

THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CLAIM FOR INDEPENDENCE
NON-CO-OPERATION
INDIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA
THE DRINK AND OPIUM EVIL
HOW INDIA CAN BE FREE
INDIAN INDEPENDENCE :
THE IMMEDIATE NEED

TO AWAKING INDIA

BY S. E. STOKES
WITH A FOREWORD
BY MAHATMA GANDHI
AND AN APPRECIATION
OF THE AUTHOR ·
BY C. F. ANDREWS
RE. 1-8

THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

BY
C. F. ANDREWS

GANESH & CO. MADRAS

THE CAMBRIDGE
PRESS, MADRAS.

CONTENTS.

	Page.
Introduction	vii
The Oppression of the poor	1
The Deadlock at Chandpur, Chapter I	21
" " II	31
" " III	44
The Spirit of East Bengal	58
The Strikes, Chapter I	70
" " II	79
" " III	85
Appendix I	
The Inquiry Committee	93
Appendix II	
Indictment of the Government and the Leaders of the People	99
Sir Henry Wheeler Condemned	111
Appendix III	
An Interview on the Gurkha Outrage. 119	
Appendix IV	
Milk for the poor—The Problem of Cow Protection	125

INTRODUCTION

THE deadlock at Chandpur, in East Bengal, which forms the background of the greater portion of this book, will probably soon pass completely out of the recollection of the great majority of Indian minds, even if it has not already done so. In the whirl of modern Indian politics, it had only a momentary gleam of interest and importance. The local news of the deadlock there between the Government and the people,—the cholera camp, the Gurkha outrage, and the strikes,—reached the general public through newspaper reports in a fragmentary manner. Whatever excitement there was for the moment has already long ago subsided. It may be advisable, therefore, in this introduction to explain briefly what this Chandpur incident really implied and how it actually began. In this way, the chapters which follow will be more easily understood. I

shall have to begin a little further back in my narrative, in order to make everything plain.

I

In the year 1919, which was a period of exceptional scarcity and distress in the Gorakhpur District of the United Provinces, a very large number of agricultural labourers from the villages found their way up to the tea gardens of Lower Assam. In ordinary years, these villagers had to be recruited, at considerable expense to the estate managers; but in this year of distress they flocked up of their own accord. As the tea industry, at that time, was in a prosperous condition, these labourers found a ready employment. They were rapidly absorbed into the ordinary labour force.

But, unfortunately, only a year later, the boom in the tea industry, which had followed the conclusion of the Great War, subsided. A sharp depression set in. By the end of 1920 and the beginning of 1921, many of the tea gardens in Lower Assam, especially in the Chargola valley, were very

hard pressed indeed. European managers were either dismissed with a bonus, or put on short allowance. Retrenchment was the order of the day. Instructions were sent out by the directors in England, that only fine pluckings of leaves from the tea bushes were to be made and that no new cultivation was to be undertaken. Amidst all this reduction, it can easily be understood how difficult it became to find employment for the excessively large labour force taken on to the gardens in the year 1919. The Assam Government was at last seriously alarmed. Schemes of new road construction, in order to cope with unemployment, were introduced. It was a crisis of no ordinary kind.

II

During the early months of 1921, there was great excitement in Assam, as well as in Bengal, over the non-co-operation movement. Thousands of students from the colleges had struck work, and strikes were frequent in the industrial world. It would appear, from reports sent down by

the managers of the tea gardens, that political workers had been urging the labourers in the Chargola valley to strike. Attempts were said to have been made in other valleys also, and in Upper Assam, and on the Darjeeling tea estates. But these had not the same result as in the Chargola valley. Presumably, the failure in those other districts was due to the fact, that the distress there was not so acute and also because the managers had not taken on new labourers in excess during the year 1919. For their labour force was recruited from a different area where famine had not prevailed.

If non-co-operation workers themselves really encouraged these labour strikes, in the midst of the ferment of labour unrest and political excitement, then there can be no question that they were acting directly against the instructions of Mahatma Gandhi. For he had issued a strong warning in 'Young India' against the use of labour strikes as political weapons, because they were almost certain to lead to violence and would only disturb the true

course of the non-co-operation movement. He had put his own precepts into practice and had done his utmost to prevent strikes of any kind among the mill-labourers of Ahmedabad. There could be no excuse for his followers, therefore, if they refused to take heed to such warnings. Mahatma Gandhi's words had been quite explicit, and they had also become very widely published and discussed in the Press.

III

But in the Chargola valley, apart from any action of political workers, the distress among the labourers had evidently become so great, that a conflagration at any moment was imminent. As I have pointed out, the Assam Government was well aware of the danger. It required only a spark to enkindle the flame. I was not personally present in Lower Assam before the strike began, but I received my information from entirely reliable sources, including that of a Government official on special duty with the Assam Labour force. I had

also what might be regarded as circumstantial evidence at Chandpur itself. For the condition of the hunger-stricken and almost naked refugees (as we met them for the first time at Chandpur) revealed to us some terrible disaster in the background. Their misery and destitution, on their arrival, would be difficult to exaggerate in words: it was pitiable almost beyond description.

Even Sir Henry Wheeler acknowledges the wretchedness of their condition in his Report. For one moment, as he tries to describe what he saw, a breath of warmth enters into the icy atmosphere of his official statement. Yet Sir Henry Wheeler only saw them a fortnight after their arrival. In that fortnight, they had been fed and clothed, cheered and tended, by the devoted care both of the towns-people and also of the national volunteers. One is led to wonder what he would have thought, if he had seen these refugees when they first came down from the estates.

It certainly seemed no sufficient expla-

nation, to us who were on the spot, when the Tea Planters' Association published in the English Press, that their forlorn and famished condition was due solely to the hardships of the journey down from Assam. The things we saw with our own eyes pointed much rather to a long period of lack of nourishing food. Some of the refugees were well-built and sturdy and still physically fit: but the general impression was one of utter misery and want.

In the weeks that followed, we had abundant opportunities of going round to groups of these refugees in the different camps and thus gathering at first hand from them by careful cross-examination the reasons why they left the estates. It was quite easy for me personally to do this, as their language was familiar and I was particularly anxious to find out the truth at first hand. The usual explanation given by them was, that work had become short on the estates and that a full day's wage had not been provided. One manager had told them that he

did not care whether they went or whether they remained. The full wage at that time for a completed task, had been four annas, (i.e., four pence) ; but they had very rarely, of late, received even half that amount.

Even allowing for the natural exaggeration, which is common to ignorant and illiterate people all the world over, yet it was the opinion of every relief worker who saw their condition, that they had suffered privation for a long time before they left the gardens. The bad economic position of the tea industry seemed exactly to corroborate the story of the refugees. There was a coincidence here, which could not be lightly explained away.

IV

Chandpur itself is a provincial town, of moderate size, situated on one of the branches of the Delta made by the Ganges and the Brahmaputra. It lies directly on the route which every one has to travel who wishes to go into Lower Assam. The place is an important junction for the

Assam-Bengal Railway, which meets here the river steamers. These steamers pass backwards and forwards to Goalundo, where the East Bengal State Railway has its terminus, connecting Lower Assam with Calcutta. The river journey by steamer is a little over ninety miles.

In its land formation, Chandpur is on a kind of low promontory jutting out into the river. Channels of water are on every side. Canals and tanks intersect the town. It is like a miniature Venice inland. Such a place would be a death-trap in a severe cholera epidemic; for cholera is a water-borne disease. Thus the Chandpur area was described in the newspapers as the 'neck of a bottle' in relation to the labour exodus from Lower Assam. The only outlet for the labourers on their downward journey was through Chandpur.

Many of the refugees had boarded the trains on their march down and thus had reached the river. Others had tramped the whole distance of more than a hundred miles on foot. Thus some thousands, in a

few days' time, had reached the 'neck of the bottle' at Chandpur; and all further progress was blocked to them, unless they could proceed by steamer to Goalundo.

The Government officials on the spot, fearing naturally a cholera epidemic, gave facilities to the down-coming refugees to embark on the steamers immediately and to make the river journey to Goalundo. They were thus being sent forward at the rate of 500 to 1,000 each day. The position became all the more serious, because no one knew how long the exodus might continue and how many might come down. Immediate action had to be taken, without reference to Government head-quarters; and the officials on the spot acted according to their own judgment. There can be little doubt that by doing so they saved, for the time being, the situation.

V

Then the representatives of the tea estates in Assam took alarm and intervened. They greatly feared that a panic might set in among the labourers throughout both

the valleys of Assam, and that in consequence a general exodus might ensue.

Therefore, they did their utmost to persuade the authorities at Darjeeling to countermand the orders of the local government officials at Chandpur. Their desire was that the Governor in Council should prevent any further helping forward of refugees on their journey. Indeed, they went so far as to offer that they themselves would provide huts for the labourers, if only they could be induced to remain at Chandpur. I was personally asked by the tea estate agents to use my influence to prevent them going forward because of the danger of the exodus extending to the Upper Assam valley. I told them that I had no desire whatever to bring about any further strike; but it would be nothing less than inhuman to insist on the refugees, who had come down, remaining in the cholera-infected area at Chandpur. But this consideration did not appear to move them.

The Planters' Association won. The countermand from Darjeeling was given to

the local officials in such a peremptory manner, that it was interpreted to mean that the steamship and railway managers were not to give concessions of any kind. Yet if full rates were to be charged for so many thousands all the way back to their homes, from whence was all the money to be found for such repatriation ?

I went personally to the steamship agents and asked for concession rates, but was refused. The same obstructive order, I was told, had been given to the railway authorities. Thus it appeared to me that the Bengal Government were determined to stop the exodus altogether. I found later that there had been a partial mistake. The central authorities at Darjeeling had only refused to allow any further helping forward of the refugees by the use of government money. But the local officials were fully under the impression that the Bengal Government had gone much further and stopped all railway and steamship concessions. Thus the first stage of the Chandpur deadlock occurred.

VI

The result of the deadlock was immediately felt. The congestion of thousands of refugees at Chandpur became daily more and more acute. Cholera broke out in a virulent form.

The railway station at Chandpur is far away from the town. It is close to the landing stage of the river steamers. In the railway yard itself there is a large shed for Indian third-class passengers. When the refugees came down in great numbers, they occupied this railway shed. No other shelter was available, and the monsoon rains were threatening. Indeed, some rain had already fallen. When the Government authorities refused to help the refugees forward any longer, at first there was intense and bitter disappointment. They actually rushed one steamer, in their eagerness to get away from Chandpur. About three hundred and fifty managed to scramble on board, before the gangway could be unshipped. The steamship and Government authorities, touched by their distress, had not the heart to turn them

off the steamer, and they were allowed to proceed. Up to this point everything had been done in a humane and kindly manner; and this last act of allowing those who had rushed the gangway to go forward was the kindest act of all.

Then the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division arrived upon the scene, and acting upon instructions from Darjeeling he set himself immediately to stop any further free exodus of the refugees from Chandpur upon the river steamers. In order to prevent another 'rushing' of the steamers, he decided immediately to turn the refugees out of the railway yard altogether, and to put some distance between them and the river steamers. But, through an inexcusable disregard of consequences, the Commissioner performed this task in a manner that led directly to acts of cruelty and inhumanity.

In the first place, he did not wait to provide proper shelter for the refugees elsewhere. He drove them out from the only shelter they had, just at the time of the burst of the monsoon rains. The foot-

ball field, on to which he forcibly drove them, was absolutely shelterless. A few days after it was under water, with only the tops of the goal posts visible.

But far worse than this, he sent the Gurkha soldiers among them at dead of night to drive them out. The result might be anticipated. These Gurkhas used the butt-ends of their rifles on sick and helpless women and children, who were too weak to move rapidly. It was a brutal assault, and it was entirely unprovoked.

The news of this cruelty of the Gurkha soldiers and their dastardly attack upon invalid women and children spread like wild-fire through the neighbourhood. During the remainder of that night the mass of the townspeople went out towards the railway station and took back the stricken refugees into their own quarters, carrying the sick and wounded in their arms. They brought them close to their own homes and found them shelter. They fed and clothed them. They nursed the cholera-stricken patients, understanding

well what risks they were running both for themselves and for their families.

As I have already related, cholera had actually broken out, and an epidemic was almost certain. But the thought of this did not daunt the Chandpur people. Day after day and week after week they continued their ministry of service. Numbers of young volunteers flocked rapidly into Chandpur from every town in East Bengal. Students from the colleges and schools rendered noble and effective service. Mr. and Mrs. Goring of the Chandpur Mission and the Bishop of Assam and his wife were devoted in their nursing of the sick. Doctors came as volunteers from outside. The resident doctors of the place, one and all, rendered unselfish voluntary aid. The hearts of the people of East Bengal were deeply touched and the response was immediate.

VII

It was at this critical moment, when the one supreme need was to get all the more healthy refugees quickly forward on their

journey, that a double disaster occurred. On the one hand, no entreaty from the local government officials, who were united in their demand for the refugees to be moved from Chandpur, could shake the Bengal Government at Darjeeling. The tea interests were too strong. The Government's one fear seemed to be that there might be a fresh exodus of tea garden labour. They were determined to run no risks of that, and therefore maintained their policy of refusing to help the refugees forward. They only offered medical aid on the spot.

On the other hand, just when large subscriptions had at last been collected from the public, and it had become financially possible to send forward the refugees, even at full rates and apart from Government aid, a strike was suddenly brought about by the political leaders, both on the Assam-Bengal Railway and on the river steamers, as a protest against the Gurkha outrage and the obstructionist attitude of Government.

These two strikes were in origin sym-

pathetic. They were called for by the leaders out of sympathy with the tea garden labourers. This was their declared object. But, in reality, they only brought fresh difficulties to the refugees themselves. For they actually prevented the river steamers from running and thus shut tightly the 'neck of the bottle' at Chandpur. The refugees had to be sent back into the cholera camp, just as they were embarking.

After this, the cholera epidemic became more and more serious. At one time, it seemed as though the disease in a most deadly form was certain to spread to the town and district. But owing chiefly to the labours of Dr. Suresh Banerji and the doctors working under him, along with the band of national volunteers, the cholera epidemic was arrested. It is a singular commentary upon the picture I have drawn in this book concerning these workers, that at the present moment, Dr. Suresh Banerji himself and a large proportion of the volunteers are in prison for political offences.

Then, with the heavy monsoon rains, pneumonia broke out in the camp of the refugees. Our anxieties were redoubled, because we had so many sickly women and children, some of whom had just recovered from cholera, and this new epidemic was likely to spread among them. Our doctors and nurses were worn out with day and night duty in the hospitals. But, in God's providence, all these difficulties were gradually overcome. The Assam labourers were at last sent back, under volunteer escort, to their homes.

By far the larger proportion of the refugees had come originally from the Gorakhpur District of the United Provinces. Careful arrangements were made before hand for their reception on their return to their homes. Here again the national volunteers did splendid service. Their work also at Goalundo, Naihati and Asansol, the three halting places on the return journey, needs special mention. The refugees were quickly absorbed by the different villages; and as the harvest since their return has been a good one, there has been

no distress reported from the whole of this district. Unfortunately about four hundred of the returned labourers had come originally from the Central Provinces. These met with distress on their return, on account of scarcity prevailing there. I have to take personal blame for neglecting to make preparations in their case.

VIII

The steamship strike itself continued for more than six weeks and at last was amicably settled. Most of the men who had struck work were re-employed. But the Assam-Bengal Railway strike went lingering on and on, month after month, to the bitter end. Many thousands of employees lost their situations altogether. Hundreds of families actually starved. Even at the present time, the distress and misery are acute. It must be remembered that what I have written in this book about the strikes, was published immediately after they had taken place. My own position from the very beginning was that the strikes were contrary to Mahatma

Gandhi's instructions and that they should never have been started at all. When they were actually begun, my second object was to get honourable terms as quickly as possible and to call for a truce. But in both these matters I was unsuccessful. Indeed, it was my fate to be almost alone in my opinion among those on the spot.

Looking back, it seems clear to me that the strikes have been disastrous. Like the recent coal strike in England, they have resulted in incalculable loss to the working men without any apparent compensating gain. But viewing the whole matter from a larger aspect, it is clear that these defeats have to be suffered in the onward march of labour towards its goal of economic freedom. There is ultimately no other school, and the price has to be paid.

All that I have written in this book is now a matter of history,—a mere episode of these tumultuous political times in which we live. I have considered it best to keep practically untouched the words written in the midst of the din of conflict.

They are certain to be more fresh and vivid than anything that I might have written later. They will tell their own story, as it were, at white heat concerning the labour struggle at Chandpur.

IX

The title of this book,—‘The Oppression of the Poor,’—has been chosen with a deliberate purpose. For it has been my conviction, based on a long experience, that the revolution through which India is passing is not ultimately political. Far down below the turmoil on the surface lies this age long problem of the suffering of the poor.

Such suffering and oppression in India are not the product of modern conditions only, though they appear to me to have become more accentuated in recent times. They can be traced back historically, by means of clear records, into those ages of the past, when the Aryan races from the North invaded India and made serfs of the original inhabitants. They go back to those earliest centuries, when the colour

bar was drawn against anyone whose skin was not of the same hue as that of the conqueror. That was the period, when the millions of the aboriginal poor people of India were first made 'untouchable.'

In Africa and America to-day, another Aryan race of invaders,—the 'white race,' as it is called,—is frantically repeating every one of the fatal mistakes of that terrible Indian past. In their rashness and folly they do not pause to trace the lessons which Indian History had to teach them. For these old race problems, which were thus inhumanly handled and dealt with in the ancient history of the world, are still in very truth the central curse, which lies with all its weight, 'heavy as frost and deep as life itself,' upon the whole sub-continent of India. 'Untouchability' must first be removed, if India is ever truly to be free.

Again, the systems of Begar, Uttar, Rasad, Atwara, and the like,—the systems of 'Forced Labour' of each and every kind,—still exist in terrible and relentless power in almost every province of British India

and in the Indian States. These are clearly the evil relics of a remote antiquity, when poor unoffending villagers, men and women alike, were treated as beasts of burden rather than as human beings.

All these ancient forms of oppression, along with other abominations of past days, have to be rooted out.

Lastly, we have to confront in India, in this our own modern age with its new problems, all the evils involved in a system of Government which is aloof from the people and altogether foreign to them.

We have to struggle against the vices in personal moral character which are inherent in a foreign rule,—the servility, the subjection, the flattery, the hypocrisy, by which men gain titles and power. For these inner vices of the spirit of man lead directly to tyranny over the weak and helpless. As has been well said,—“There is no tyrant so brutal towards the poor as the man who is abject towards those who are above him.”

Intimately bound up with a foreign rule, and inseparable from it, is the burden of

excessive military expenditure. This heavy drain is still exhausting in India, each year, half the income of the country. More and more deeply and bitterly, in each successive generation, is being felt the crushing weight of the land revenue which goes to support this military extravagance. A vicious circle is formed from which there is apparently no escape.

Indebtedness in Indian village life, as Dr. Mann and many other careful investigators have shown, is on the increase. The land is being subdivided in such a manner as to make economical cultivation almost impossible. And, at the same time, there has been developing in the towns an industrial system of sweated labour, which has tended to destroy domestic life, to blight childhood, to create centres of immorality and drunkenness, and thus to form a new Indian population saturated with all the vices of the slums of the industrial West.

X

Whatever the official statistics may show by analysis as to the relative econo-

mic wealth of modern India, as compared with earlier days, there can be little doubt left in my own mind, after long personal investigation, and a thorough revision of former impressions, that the feeling of poverty among the masses of the people, brought about by the distress which always follows indebtedness and by the discontent which higher prices and more expensive standards of living always involve, has increased and not diminished in recent years.

Much of this acuter sense of the burden of poverty, which is one of the signs of the times, may be due to the comparatively rapid growth of population, ever pressing upon the margin of subsistence. The problem of over-population has clearly to be faced. The question of congested areas in the alluvial plains has to be solved. These things cannot be blindly put on one side. But however the facts may be explained which the census figures disclose, as to over-population, yet at the same time to everyone who thinks deeply it is surely becoming plain, that the masses of India are no longer as they used to be. They

are rapidly changing their character. The sense of the oppression from which they suffer is now made vocal in a thousand ways. Things which were endured silently before are endured silently no longer.

This misery caused by the sense of oppression is the greatest driving force of our own age. It is driving the multitudes of India to revolution.

XI

The deadlock at Chandpur which these pages record may have been but one tiny incident in the midst of world convulsions which are shaking the whole fabric of modern civilisation. But all the same it has a significance of its own; for it is, a replica, in miniature, of those world forces themselves.

We can see the weakness of a foreign Government, which lives aloof from the sufferings and cries of the common people. We can also understand the weakness of a popular cause, which relies on excitement rather than upon sound reason for its basis of action.

Again, we can gain a vivid picture of the essential selfishness of a capitalistic system, with its absentee directorate remote from the lives of the poor who serve under it. We can watch this system ready to sacrifice human life in a cholera epidemic, if only its business interests are preserved. We can see also the essential selfishness underlying popular politics, when the poor are used as pawns in the game, and homes and families are wrecked.

And yet, at the same time, in Chandpur, the essential nobleness which is within the human heart shines through. For it was a generous thing done by the local officials, when they allowed the three hundred and fifty refugees, who had rushed the steamer, to proceed without payment, instead of turning them back again by force as they could easily have done. That was a bold rejection by the human heart of the tyranny of red-tape regulations. It was a splendid gesture of contempt for mere official routine.

And noble indeed, as the chapters which follow will amply show, were all the

kindly deeds of human service performed by the townspeople and by the national volunteers. These things have revealed a 'soul of goodness' in things evil.

XII

One word more I would add, with very great diffidence and with a sense of unworthiness. I would wish to state simply what an inspiration and a blessing during those days of suffering at Chandpur the writings of the poet, Rabindranath Tagore, were to me. These, together with the scriptures of my childhood and other sacred writings, were all in all to me. At such times, the world of politics passes into the background and takes its own ephemeral place. The Eternal alone remains, and these writings spoke to me of the Eternal.

Calicut,

C. F. ANDREWS.

THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

I have just come out of the furnace of affliction at Chandpur, where, in a cholera-encampment, we were forced to see, day after day, the misery of our brothers and sisters and their little children, the refugees from Assam. If this record bears upon its surface the marks of the fire that burnt within us, I know that I shall be pardoned by all those who read my words with understanding hearts. For I cannot, at such a time, keep a judicial aloofness from my subject. What we have just been through cannot be forgotten easily and lightly. I am giving hot memories, not cold, calculated thoughts,—memories that still burn, even while I put them down in this Shantiniketan Ashram, where all around me is smiling with peace, in the

2 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

pure joy of the fresh monsoon rains, and where nature herself is rejoicing in the beauty of new life.

The story has been already told, how the refugees came down from the tea gardens of Assam, emaciated beyond description; with stark hunger looking out of their eyes; with scarcely sufficient rags to cover their own nakedness; with little children who could hardly stand, their legs were so thin; with babies, pinched by hunger, seeking in vain to draw nourishment from their mothers' breasts. I have seen many sights of misery and destitution before,—in a sense, my life has been full of such sights. But I have never seen such utter misery as I saw among these refugees, when I met them on the railway platform at Naihati first of all, and then afterwards at Chandpur itself. What was the actual origin of their exodus, has still to be investigated. But one thing at least was evident, from first to last, as we went in and out among them. In their destitution, they were miserable beyond description. Misery was the spur which had goaded

them forward on their journey. They had one hope left, to which they clung with a pathos that was as great as their suffering itself. It was the hope, that through Mahatma Gandhi, deliverance would come from all their burden of sorrow and affliction.

We watched each day these poor refugees from Assam in the cholera encampments on both sides of the river channel. We saw the courage that sustained them. We noticed how their spirits were kept up, during those long-drawn days of disappointment, by this hope which I have mentioned. To the men, who were refugees, it gave patience and endurance. To the women, it was like a passion of the soul; and they were able to enkindle something of their enthusiasm even in their little children. The national volunteers, who worked among them, used to talk to one another with wonder about this. It was a transforming faith that raised the whole scene above the commonplace, and touched it with spiritual beauty.

It is true, indeed, that Mahatma Gandhi

4 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

himself has set his face firmly against any religious cult being originated in his name. He has repeatedly stated, that he is an ordinary man with no claim to supernatural powers, beyond those to which ordinary men may attain by trust in the supreme. But this devotion which we all witnessed at Chandpur, among these poor refugees, was rather the devotion to an idea than to a person. Mahatma Gandhi represented to them that idea, tinged with his own personality, and it filled their minds to the full. His name was the concrete symbol which expressed it. He was the embodiment to them of their ultimate deliverance from oppression.

I must tell, at some length, one story which touched my heart most deeply. As we made our voyage with the last contingent of refugees from Chandpur to Goalundo, I had been walking to and fro along the decks of the crowded steamer. We had left behind us for good, oh! how thankfully, the cholera camp with all its misery. There was a busy eagerness among the refugees and a hum of expectation. One

slender figure on the upper deck had stirred my compassion each time I had lingered near him. He was a little boy, about twelve years old, who had recovered (so I was told) from cholera, but was still so weak and thin, that he had to be carried on board and to lie on the deck during the voyage. While I stood beside him, we happened to pass out of the mid stream of the great river. The steamer came suddenly round a bend quite close to the shore. Bright, healthy children on the bank were running along and shouting,—“Gandhi Maharaj ki jai! Gandhi Maharaj ki jai!”

I looked at the invalid child on deck. His face shone with excitement and he raised his head with great difficulty. Then he waved his hand to the children running along the bank, and cried in a voice that was pitifully weak,—“Gandhi Maharaj ki jai!”

Out of all the suffering and misery which we have been through, the haunting face of that child still stands out before my mind. There was something in it, through all the weakness, that seemed to

6 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

have conquered death. It carried a light within the soul, which the Upanishad long ago named, 'the joy that is deathless.' As I stood watching him, lying there on the deck and waving his hand, the tears came streaming from my eyes. I remembered the words of the great prayer,—

Asato ma sad gamaya,
Tamaso ma jyotir gamaya,
Mrityor mamritam gamaya,.....
Avir, Avir, ma edhi.

"Lead me from untruth to truth; lead me from darkness to light; lead me from death to immortality. O thou Manifest One, be thou Manifest in me."

The thought came like a flash to me, that here, in this child's faith, God himself was being revealed. Through all this suffering and pain, the words were finding their fulfilment,—"God manifests himself in forms of deathless joy."

In the midst of all these scenes, the question was borne in upon my mind with great insistence,—"Is this that I have seen one of the signs of a new religious awakening throughout the length and

breadth of India?" It has seemed to me, that there is much to-day which points to a positive answer. The poor of India, who have been so terribly oppressed by governments and priestcrafts, by landowners and profiteers, have cried to God for deliverance. They are becoming more and more certain that the hour of their freedom is at hand. During the past few months, it has been my own lot in life to travel over almost every part of the North of India, from East to West and from West to East,—to places as far distant from one another as Sindh and East Bengal. On these journeys, I have seen strange happenings and witnessed a new spirit. This new spirit, I am convinced, goes far deeper than the political movement of our times. It has its own initial impulse from the poor. Again and again, it has appeared to me to bear striking analogy to what we read in history concerning the fateful days before the French Revolution, when the oppressed peasantry of France awoke to the new idea of the equality and brotherhood of Man.

8 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

Let me try to put my thought more concretely, even at the risk of repetition. The one thing that has impressed itself upon my mind and heart lately, more than any other, is this. The countless millions of the poor in India are all astir. They are coming forth out of their long dark night of ignorance and oppression. They have symbolised their yearning for deliverance in the person of Mahatma Gandhi. Pitifully, eagerly, pathetically, and sometimes almost tragically, they have placed their all,—their destiny, their hopes, their aims, their very life itself,—in his keeping. They are quite firm in their faith, that he alone can bring deliverance. This is not happening in one place only. Time after time, recently, I have been in the company of the poor and the outcast and the destitute, at gatherings where the untouchables and others have flocked together in crowds to meet me and I have listened with intense pain to the story of their afflictions. They appear now everywhere to be taking their courage in both hands as they have never done before.

The incidents with regard to oppression which they relate,—with reference to forced labour and forced supplies and forced impositions by the police and subordinate officers, and also with reference to the forced impositions of caste customs and caste restrictions, equally tyrannical,—have made my blood boil with indignation. They have often exhibited an emotion which was almost violent in its urge upwards towards the surface. I have seen in it something of that *elan vital*, of which Henri Bergson writes, and have thanked God for it, even though it has not seldom startled me by its explosive energy. I do not think there can be any question, that a flame has been kindled within and the fire has begun to burn. Again I would make reference to the days before the French Revolution, as perhaps the closest analogy to what is happening before our very eyes in India to-day.

There is one picture, which may be given at this point, by way of illustration. I was at Patna Junction on my way back from Gorakhpur, where I had been enquir-

10 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

ing concerning the home-coming of the refugees from Chandpur. Late in the day, as the sun was setting behind a ridge of dark monsoon clouds, with streaks of gold piercing through the gathering darkness, I was seated quietly on the platform trying to collect my thoughts while the evening was drawing to its close. Many persons had come to see me, and quiet was difficult at such a time and place. The porters and sweepers and others,—whom the railway authorities call the ‘menial staff’—having heard of my arrival, gathered round me in a body. They knew that I was a friend of Mahatma Gandhi, and they welcomed me on that account.

At first, they greeted me in silence, with their uplifted hands placed together in an attitude of prayer. Then one of them, who was in the forefront as their leader, cried out,—“Gandhi Maharaj ki jai !” It was not a conventional and jovial shout, such as is often heard from processions that pass along the street. It was rather the solemn call of religion. A light came

into their eyes, and their hands continued to be uplifted in prayer to the end. It was like an act of evening worship.

After this, they went back to their various duties on the railway. It was only a momentary flash that I had seen,—a look, a gaze, a gesture; but it spoke to me at once of the same emotion, which I had witnessed so many times before. It told me what depth of religious idealism there is in the hearts of the simple poor. That evening scene in Patna Junction, with the setting sun and the gathering darkness, brought back with a strange power the memory of sunsets at Chandpur. For there at Chandpur, again and again, just as the sun was setting, I had passed along the road and mingled with the groups of the Assam refugees, sitting in dejection, and had seen the look of hope return to their eyes, as they had raised the cry,—“Gandhi Maharaj ki jai!”

The darkness of that despair at Chandpur had been broken with a golden light of hope. However great might be the sufferings of the poor, whether as the

12 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

menial staff of a railway, or on the tea plantations, or elsewhere, life to them with such ideals of emancipation, as they were now enthusiastically grasping, was at least a nobler thing than the dull monotony that went before with no hope, no faith to cheer them. The crust of the surface of their poverty-stricken existence had been broken. The waters of life from beneath the hard rock had gushed forth; and even if all should end in outward failure, who should say that it had been in vain?

How wonderful is this spring of freshness that ever wells up from the hearts of the poor! People have often called them the 'lower classes',—as though the uneducated were also the unrefined; as though the illiterate were also the unlearned. But it is not so in truth. There is a wisdom and a refinement that come from the very suffering itself, which the poor have constantly to bear. Who are we to despise them? It was Christ himself who turned away from the luxurious cities of Capernaum and Bethsaida, and went directly to

the oppressed peasants of Galilee and pronounced blessing upon them, rather than upon the rich. "Blessed," he said, "are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven." Nay, further, Christ preferred even the company of the publicans and sinners, with their open vices, to the society of the wealthy Scribes and Pharisees, with their cloak of self-righteousness. For the vices of those who are the outcast of society are on the surface, and they suffer punishment often beyond their deserving. But the vices of the wealthy are glozed over with all kinds of soothing palliatives, and therefore in this life they rarely suffer for their evil deeds to the full.

Thus, there is always a fertile soil in the hearts of the poor, which is ready to receive the good seed and to make it fruitful. A religious faith, that is able to strike its roots deep in this soil, is far more likely to flourish than some respectable creed, which owes its origin to conventionally-educated mankind. It is Mahatma Gandhi's fellow-suffering with the suffering poor: his fellow-poverty with the

14 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

poverty-stricken poor: his fellow-hardship with the hardship-bearing poor, which has endeared him to their hearts. It is this which has won from them an instinctive reverence. It is this, which has made them flock to him from every countryside wherever he goes. It is this, which has made them follow his simple precepts, so that, in a few short months, intoxicating drink and drugs have marvellously decreased. It is this, which has caused a new hope to be born in millions of hearts, where before reigned only the blank apathy of despair.

What does this all mean? What will happen, if the signs which I have been trying to read are true?

There is a grim story about the French Revolution, which, if my memory serves, is told by Carlyle,—how the encyclopædists and the state record-keepers were busily absorbed with their files, when the Revolution burst upon them. They were told by the revolutionaries that, if they did not side with the poor, their “skins should form the parchments for the next records.”

I do not believe that the religious and social revolution in India, which is now so close upon us, will be violent in its character like the French Revolution. There is an innate love of peace in India that is not present in any other country. It is not in vain that the teaching of the Buddha permeated India for more than a thousand years. But, while there may be no ultimate appeal to force and force alone, yet the misery of the conflict will be terrible indeed, if the present almost complete aloofness of the officials from the common people continues, and if these same officials set themselves in final opposition to those leaders whose lives are lived among the people and who suffer with the people.

I can well remember the year 1907, in the Punjab, and the popular disturbances of that year. At a most critical time, I implored an official to do some very simple thing in order to come in touch with the people. He turned to me sharply and said,—“Look at those files.” I told him Carlyle’s story about the French Revolution that I have just mentioned.

16 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

There has been no sign of any change for the better from that time to this. Rather, the heap of official files has grown greater. The aloofness of the Government officers from the common people is vast. Summer hill-stations, away from the real life of India, are still regarded as necessary for health and comfort. The foreign character of the Government is becoming still more foreign, in spite of the reforms and the added Indian members. This, at least, has been my own experience at Chandpur, where a crucial test was applied and the failure of Government to meet the test was manifest.

But I would go further in recalling the bitterness of my experience. The English education which the country has been receiving, has created a gulf between the 'classes' and the 'masses', which is almost as wide as that between the Government and the poor. If the Bengal Government's recent action, when tried in the balance, has been found wanting, there has been much also that has been found wanting among those who have received to the full their English

education, but, while obtaining it, have shamefully neglected the poor. The truth is, and it cannot be too clearly stated, the English mode of life, with its motor car comforts continually prevents the educated Indian, just as much as it does the educated Englishman, from coming into close and intimate contact with the poor of India.

Mahatma Gandhi has written in 'Young India' the following words:—"The fact is that it is impossible for any Viceroy to see the truth, living as he does on the mountain tops seven months in the year and in complete isolation. With the big 'business house' of Government in Simla and the growing millions on the plains, there is a solid dead rock; and even the piercing cry of the feeble millions is broken into nothingness, as it heaves up to the mountain top from the plains." That is true of Darjeeling as well as Simla.

In the same copy of 'Young India,' we have a letter from Mr. Abbas Tyabji showing how the abandonment of the life-long habits formed by an almost purely

English education had brought Mr. Abbas Tyabji himself close to the heart of the poor.

"I assure you," he writes, "you need not have the slightest anxiety about my health. The 'khaddar,' adopted at Bez-wada, has made me twenty years younger. What an experience I am having! Everywhere I am received most cordially and affectionately, even by the women of the villages..... Some of our workers are lacking in 'go'. I suppose they represent the very respectable class, to which I have ceased to belong. Good heavens! What an experience! I have so much love and affection from the common folk to whom it is now an honour to belong. It is this *fakir's* dress, which has broken down all barriers. Now, men and women meet me, as I would have them meet me. If I had only known, years ago, how the *fenta*, the *saya*, the *angarakha*, the boots and stockings, separated me from my poorer brethren!"

I would go one step further still. The inhuman restrictions which have grown

up along with the caste system, especially with regard to untouchability, have also placed a barrier between the higher castes and the poorest of the poor, which is no less a disgrace to mankind than the separation between the 'classes' and the 'masses'. If I have burnt with indignation at the action of the Gurkha soldiers, who were turned out to beat and wound defenceless and sickly refugees by Government officials, I have also burnt with indignation no less deep at the wrongs done to my own Indian brothers and sisters by those, who have beaten and wounded the souls of the poor through branding them with the curse of untouchability. I write with shame as a Christian, because I have found out, after careful enquiry, that in the South of India my own Christian brothers and sisters are not seldom treated in this manner by Christians, who keep caste, even as my brothers and sisters among the Hindus are treated by high-caste Hindus.

I have written from a very full heart. What I have here stated in writing has

20 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

been pent up in my mind for many weeks, some of it for many years. The conclusion of the whole matter is this,—the central problem of India to-day is the oppression of the poor !

THE DEADLOCK AT CHANDPUR

CHAPTER I

We appear to be in the midst of a great national uprising in Chandpur, and some at least of the facts ought to be recorded, while the memory of them is fresh. I would venture to ask vernacular newspapers in every province, whose pages are read among the masses and reach even distant villages, to translate, for their information, this narrative which I am recording. For I am more and more convinced every day, that the strength of the national movement is in the villages.

Here in this centre of activity in Chandpur, every moment of the day is occupied. It is only with the greatest difficulty that any leisure can be found to write. The early morning I have found to be the most suitable time, and I have tried to use it. Those who have known me personally

will understand how difficult this crowded life has been to me, and how often I have wished to get away from the multitude and retire to the peace of Shantiniketan. Even though I am fully aware, day by day, that this is impossible, the longing always remains.

What I have been witnessing has been quite a new experience for me. East Bengal before this time had been practically an unknown country. I had only spent one unforgettable day with the poet, Rabindranath Tagore, in his house-boat, on the river Padma, at Shileida. On that brief occasion, however, I had hardly any chance of seeing the character and customs of the people. But this long stay at Chandpur, at such a critical moment in the history of East Bengal, has given me a singularly vivid impression. For we have been passing through stirring times, when the depths of character are revealed. It has been a period of common suffering; and suffering is often the one thing that brings out most quickly what is true in man.

Thank God, the cholera epidemic is now being brought under control; yet for some days it had all the appearance of gaining the upper hand. The work of rescue very nearly got beyond the most strenuous efforts of the volunteers. We are now able to look back on those days as a man looks back upon a nightmare or a civil dream. Thank God, those days are past.

The sight, which I saw on the first morning after I had landed at Chandpur, will always remain painfully fresh in my memory. I went round as soon as possible to pay my first visit to every group of refugees. Some lay stretched upon the ground; some remained seated in silent misery: a few were moving listlessly about. That morning, the strain to the workers had become excessive on account of the new infections which had developed in the night.

I saw one poor woman writhing in agony on the open pathway; she was lying there at the very time we were going past on our rounds. A stretcher was improvised as quickly as possible and before we had

reached the cholera hospital sheds she had been taken in there by four volunteers. We entered a small building, which had been set apart as a fever ward. The number of patients was so great that they were lying huddled together on the bare earthen floor in misery. It was almost unendurable to see all the suffering and to be able to do nothing to relieve it. In one corner of the room there was a dying woman, who had been taken into this special fever ward, but had developed cholera. There she lay, in this fever hospital, among the other patients. She had been very slightly separated from the rest, but the place was so crowded that any real isolation was impossible. Yet she was much too ill to be moved elsewhere. The doctor told me that she could not live. She was in an advanced stage of pregnancy, and the unborn child would perish along with the mother. The agony of the suffering that I saw in that fever ward cannot easily be forgotten.

As we went further, we met two more volunteers carrying along in a

roughly-made hand-cart another refugee, an emaciated woman, who appeared to be dying of cholera. She was moaning, in a low tone, with a monotony of long-drawn pain. Her voice grew weaker and weaker as the hand-cart was stopped, and the doctor came near to examine her and to feel her pulse. The doctor told me that he was afraid it was too late to save her life. She was borne along once more by the volunteers to the cholera hospital, to receive the saline injection. As we proceeded, we saw others, chiefly women and children, lying down on the side of the pathway, some of them ill, some of them exhausted, some simply hopeless and wretched. As I have said, the work that day had got beyond the workers, willing and devoted though they were, and eager to do all they could to rescue the sufferers.

We came at last to the main encampment of the Assam refugees, where more than fifteen hundred had been collected in one place. They were patiently waiting there, from early morning, for their daily ration of uncooked rice. At that period of

the trouble it was distributed from this centre. I was clad in an Indian dress, and the mass of the refugees seemed to recognise, by some instinct, that I had come to help them. All on a sudden there was a cry. It sounded more like a wail than anything else.

Then they surged forward towards me in a body and began to prostrate themselves upon the ground and to touch my feet. It was no mere formal action of "pranam." It was much rather the agonised gesture of despair. They desired to express in this way their helpless misery. The women were the first to come forward. They brought their babies and placed their tiny heads upon my feet. They told their little children to do the same and themselves made their "pranam" with one prolonged pathetic agony of sorrow. The men followed them. Nothing could stop the crowd as it moved towards me, surging to and fro.

I saw some volunteers trying to keep the people back. But it seemed to me far better to let these poor people come forward just

as they pleased. What they were doing appeared to give some slight momentary relief. It came to my mind, that they had received so little comfort of any kind hitherto. They had been driven here, and driven there, and driven everywhere. Let them at last *now* do what they wished, unhindered. The volunteers at once recognised my meaning. They desisted from their efforts to prevent them from coming forward.

The pain of it all was hard to bear. There is such a thing as crowd psychology, and the suffering that they were enduring came home in this way to my own mind in a wave of reflex pain. When I was in Fiji, in 1917, I had something of the same experience on a smaller scale. At day-break, one morning, in Suva a company of about fifty Tamil indentured labourers, who had walked fifteen miles through the jungle and crossed two large rivers, had come to see me and to tell me about some acts of cruelty, which had been practised on them at a certain plantation. They had been waiting there, outside my own room,

during a large part of the night. For they had arrived shortly after midnight and had not awakened me. As soon as I came out into the open air, just as the dawn was breaking through dark clouds, they all prostrated themselves at full length upon the ground before me, in deepest misery. A low wail went up from their lips which touched me to the heart. The mothers, who had walked all that rough journey with their little babies, laid them at my feet to get my blessing upon them, and then prostrated themselves with a gesture of utter despair.

The scene, which I have described, at Chandpur, and the wailing note of despair which was raised by these Chandpur refugees, were extraordinarily parallel to that scene and that wailing cry which happened on that morning, many years ago, at Suva, in Fiji. In a moment, my memory had flashed back to Fiji and those Tamil indentured labourers. I could not help but feel that the miseries, which these refugees from Assam had been through, must have been somewhat similar to those in

Fiji. I think that it is likely that there was nothing in Assam like the cruelty of some of the plantations in Fiji. That is my general impression. But the destitution here seemed to be almost greater. There was greater physical emaciation.

For a long time, extending for nearly half an hour, this action of prostration went on here in Chandpur without any pause or intermission. The women were those who crowded round me most of all. Fathers as well as mothers brought their little children. Before it was over, nearly all the women in the encampment must have come forward, and most of the little children. It was noticeable to me that there was scarcely a single youth present between the ages of twelve and twenty. From what I have seen among these refugees, it seems as though the young men, as they grow up, go off elsewhere and leave the plantations.

At last the crowd became less dense, and it was possible to move very slowly forward, step by step. Then, as I was departing, the last pitiful scene of this tragic

drama of despair was acted out to the end. The hands of the thronging crowd were raised above their heads, as though in a last act of entreaty. After that some one in the midst of the multitude uttered a cry,—“Gandhi Maharaj ki jai.” It was almost ghost-like in its feebleness and faintness. When this cry was uttered, the whole crowd took up the same wailing note. It was like the cry of lost souls. “Gandhi Maharaj ki jai! Gandhi Maharaj ki jai! Gandhi Maharaj ki jai!”

The voices died away and there was quiet everywhere. The misery at this time appeared to be so complete, that silence took the place of words. These were the first days after the Gurkha outrage, when the misery was greatest.

I have heard the shouts raised by crowds of half-famished people during the railway strikes at Lillooh and Lucknow and Kanchrapara. But those shouts were shouts of victory compared with this wailing note of misery which I heard at Chandpur.

THE DEADLOCK AT CHANDPUR

CHAPTER II

Again and again, as I saw the helpless crowd of suffering men and women and children, who came forward to greet me on the first morning of my arrival, my heart burnt hot with indignation to think of that scene on the railway station platform at Chandpur, when the Gurkha soldiers were sent forward by official orders to drive the refugees out of the station.

I could picture to myself, as I went round that morning, these same poor feeble and emaciated women with their babies, dragging wearily along by the hand their little children, who were quite unable to move quickly, while all the time the Gurkha soldiers kept beating them with the butt ends of their rifles, in order to force them to move faster. I could picture the

turmoil and confusion, the crying and weeping, on that platform, in the middle of the night, under the light of the moon. Women would be dragging their children here and there separated from their husbands. Children would be driven in one direction and mothers in another, and all the while the blows were being struck to force the people to move on.

No valid excuse can be put forward for this action on the part of those officials, who called in the Gurkhas that night and gave them that inhumane order to carry out. A hundred other methods might have been tried. Just a little forbearance and a little patience were needed. If the worst had come to the worst, and the refugees had still clung to the railway platform, the incoming train could have been halted a little way from the station and the passengers and luggage removed a short distance from the platform for a single night. It is noticeable that no attempt whatever had been made on that evening itself by the refugees to rush the steamer as they had attempted to do on the pre-

vious evening. It must have been well known by the officials, that the local leaders were doing all they could to prevent any further rushing of the steamer. One thing at least was obvious. With a force of fifty Gurkha soldiers, armed with rifles and bayonets, in addition to the police, it was absurdly easy to guard the steamer on that night from any rush. Nothing could have been simpler, therefore, than to leave the matter of clearing the railway station until the next day, when an understanding with the local leaders might have been obtained and the refugees might have been removed without any violence whatever. There was all the more reason for waiting, as, according to my information, the football ground to which the Gurkha soldiers drove the refugees was absolutely shelterless.

But the official mind moves always in a narrow groove and inevitably lacks imagination. The essential cruelty and inhumanity of the deed as it was actually committed, never seemed to have been remotely apparent to those who committed

it. That was the tragedy of the whole situation.

My own arrival on the scene was only one single day after the occurrence. The outstanding wonder to me was the fact, that the highly emotional people of East Bengal, in Chandpur, who had such sights of outrage and violence before their eyes (which the night time would naturally magnify) were restrained at the critical moment from reprisals.

I am convinced, after careful enquiry, that the peace and non-violence which were so strictly observed on that night, were due primarily to the determination of the crowd to follow Mahatma Gandhi's precepts, and in the second place, to the remarkable influence of the local leaders who were present at Chandpur. If two names may be singled out beyond all others, I am certain that it was owing to the remarkable restraining power of the President, Babu Akhil Chandra Datta, and the Vice-President, Babu Hardayal Nag, of the District Congress Committee, that nothing violent was done. How great the

danger was must be apparent to everyone who reads my narrative. I speak with all reverence—it appeared to me, when I saw things on the spot, nothing less than an act of divine providence, that the influence of these two leaders had prevailed and that no reprisals for the Gurkha outrage were committed by the crowd.

I would wish, in no formal way, but from the very depth of my heart, to write one word about the wonderful devotion to duty of the national volunteers, who flocked from all sides into Chandpur at the call of duty,—from Chittagong and Comilla and Madaripur, from Dacca and Barisal, from Noakhali and Mymensingh and from other places. Each district has sent its band of workers and they have laboured side by side along with the students and residents of Chandpur and the adjacent villages. The Social Service League, the Ramakrishna Mission, the Marwari Relief Society and other bodies have rendered most noble help along with the National Congress Volunteers. It is quite impossible for me to express adequately the admiration I have felt for

the spirit which they have exhibited day by day,—the utter fearlessness of death, the quiet tenderness, the quick intelligence, the pure love and the devoted self-sacrifice. The darkness of the shadow of death itself has been lightened by these gleams of an immortal spirit of love. Life has struggled with Death, and Life has proved victorious.

It is difficult, again, to express in sufficiently warm terms my deep regard for the complete sacrifice made by the townspeople of Chandpur. They have welcomed into their very midst, nay, into their very hearts, these poor cholera stricken refugees. They have placed them, with fearless confidence, in the centre of their town, close to those whom they loved best in all the world, never thinking at all of the risk of a cholera epidemic. Though all the refugees were Hindus, the Mussalmans of Chandpur and neighbouring places have taken their full share of the burden. As soon as ever the Gurkha outrage became known on that night when this act of gross inhumanity was committed, the

townspeople of Chandpur went out in a body to the place where the refugees had been driven. It was, as I have related, a bare, shelterless football field. No provision had been made against rain and storm, even though the rain had already begun and more rain was daily expected. They were mere 'coolies.' So the officials thought. They must be got out of the way at all cost. They were a great annoyance to first and second class passengers. So the Gurkhas were sent among them.

At the sight of the persecuted and oppressed refugees thus left shelterless and destitute; at the sight of the wounds which weak women and children had received on their bodies, the townspeople of Chandpur, quick in sympathy and pity, took them at once that very night as their own guests. It was an act of tenderness that should never be forgotten. As I have said, they never thought for a single moment of the danger, of the risk of cholera infection. They accepted these refugees as their own, and gave them all they had with lavish hospitality.

The 'recklessness of love' was seen on every side. What mattered it, even if the tanks, from which they drew their water, became infected with the cholera bacilli? God would provide a protection even against that. God would provide. But what could not be allowed for a single moment was that these poor helpless, beaten, wounded people who had been given to them by God Himself, to be their guests, should be in need of shelter and not find hospitality.

I have spoken with many of the Chandpur people, who are fathers of families, and they have told me that they realised, above all other things, the sacred duty of hospitality. This was why they cared so little for the safety of their families, when the call came to receive these guests whom God had sent to them. The welcoming of a guest is a religious duty, and the Chandpur people acted in accordance with religion.

There appears to me something singularly beautiful in this fearless act of love, and it has given me an insight into the

heart of East Bengal. The Mussalmans were entirely one with the Hindus in this supreme act of hospitality and no one raised a murmur against it. They never wavered for a moment, Hindu and Mussalman alike.

To mention another side of the same subject, the food also which the townspeople of Chandpur have provided for their guests has been lavish in its abundance. I have often watched the rations being given out and they have more than satisfied the famished labourers. It must have been long since they received such ample provision for their daily needs. The Chandpur people have not stinted their hospitality.

It must be clearly understood that what I have described about the cholera-stricken condition of the place is now most fortunately very nearly a thing of the past. The untiring energies of Doctor S. Banerji and his staff of fellow doctors, including Dr. Jogesh Chandra Sur, Nripendra Nath Bose, Amir Husain, Satya Prasad Sen Gupta, P. N. Biswas, N. N. Guha, N. Bose, S. C. Bose and others have

at last brought the disease under control. The abundance of garments which has arrived from Chittagong and elsewhere has given great relief. The various medical attendants, compounders, nurses and other workers deserve our gratitude side by side with the doctors whom they so enthusiastically helped.

I would refer once more, if I may, to the Social Service League, the Ramakrishna Mission and the Marwari Relief Society which gave us such invaluable service. I find, when I look back, that, here and there, I have been describing over again some of the things which I had mentioned before. The truth is that the memory of those first days is still so deep and vivid, that other memories fall into the background in comparison with it. Furthermore, I would wish it clearly to be understood, that it has not fallen to my own personal share of the work to nurse the sick, greatly though I should have wished to do so. That has been done by other most capable and willing hands. For my own special work, there has been the need to deal daily and

hourly with all the perplexing questions relating to Government and the people. It has been a difficult, but necessary task to stand in a certain sense midway between the two parties, seeking to represent the cause of humanity and to make every effort for peace where peace would help forward the refugees most quickly back to their homes. The different strikes and *hartals* have come thick and fast, each representing the impatience and indignation of the people. It has been necessary for someone to make the official mind understand this indignation, and it has been possible for me in some measure to do so, because I have understood and experienced that indignation so deeply myself.

For while I have felt, on the one hand, that the strikes were made far too hastily, because made in hot blood and without sufficient forethought, yet at the same time I have felt also the burning sense of the outrage on those poor helpless men and women and children, who were refugees from Assam. It cannot be made too plain, that it was the Gurkha outrage,

in the Chandpur railway station, which was the fountain-head of all the subsequent disaster.

Alas! the deadlock still continues! Even to-night, when it has nearly reached the hour of midnight, at this very moment while I am trying to finish this second chapter of the struggle, a letter has been brought in from the steamship company, giving us the sad, unwelcome news of yet another strike. This new strike has now prevented one further detachment of refugees from getting away from Chandpur by an alternative route, which was still open.. We have had the pitiable sight over again of some 400 refugees being turned back, at the last moment in the bitterest disappointment, just when they had been passed by the doctor and were ready to embark.

When once the chain of evil has been forged and rivetted tight, as was done by this Gurkha outrage, how hard it is to break the chain. Evil begets evil. But just as I have seen one evil following another, and one suffering following an-

other, creating a chain of evil and suffering, even so my own belief is certain and assured that the devotion of these young volunteers and of the townspeople of Chandpur will bear abundant fruit of good. Evil begets evil, it is true. But it is also true that goodness begets goodness. Goodness not evil, is, surely triumphing to-day. All the self-sacrifice in Chandpur cannot have been in vain!

If I may be allowed to draw the moral from what I have seen and heard in Chandpur, it is this. We have, all of us, been learning a lesson, which God Himself has taught us. We have been learning to honour and to serve the poor and the oppressed.

These refugees might have been regarded as 'mere coolies.' But we have been taught to receive them as children of God. These refugees might have been regarded as mere strangers. But we have been taught to honour them as our own loved and welcomed guests. Could there have been any lesson taught us, which could lead more directly to Swaraj?

THE DEADLOCK AT CHANDPUR

CHAPTER III

The end came very suddenly at last. If ever the proverb, "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick," was felt to be true, it was in the case of those of us who were wearily waiting at Chandpur, expectant for the last repatriation to take place and yet finding no way by which it could be accomplished. I cannot describe in words the distress of that deep longing, especially on one crucial day, when the death-rate suddenly rose in an alarming manner and the news was brought to us that the cholera epidemic had spread to the neighbouring villages. Up to that time, the one great cause of thankfulness in all our minds had been throughout, the knowledge that in spite of the fact that the townspeople, in their devotion of utter unselfishness, had

taken the cholera stricken refugees into their very midst and allowed them to use their own tanks, from which their drinking water was taken, nevertheless there had been hitherto not a single death by cholera in the homes of the townspeople themselves.

But, now, this record had been broken. The manager of the Marwari Stores, whose name was Gourishankar Mertia,—one who had been working in his spare time as a volunteer and rendering every possible service,—was suddenly attacked by cholera. On the very same day, there came the disturbing intelligence, that three persons in a neighbouring village had died of cholera and there were cases in other villages also. The cholera in the camp of the refugees again showed an upward tendency. We looked each other in the face, morning after morning, as the list of the deaths from cholera on the previous night was produced by the doctors, and we said to one another,—“ This deadlock must be brought to an end.”

But just here, at this very point, the

strike of the steamship employees stood directly and fatally in the way, blocking the exit. It was all our own doing and our regrets on that account were very bitter. Indeed, as might easily be expected, this steamship strike became soon nothing more nor less than a labour strike, pure and simple. It tended more and more to ignore the refugees altogether. With the steamship labourers' feeling of sympathy for the refugees, all our hearts and minds were united in Chandpur. But we could not, for the life of us, understand why it was regarded as necessary for the steamers to go on striking in such a way as to keep those refugees themselves in cholera-stricken Chandpur. No one has yet been able to show me the logic of such a position. When I made enquiries, it was said that even to give a crew to one single ship, in order to bring back the refugees from Chandpur, would have "endangered the strike." But this was surely putting the safety of the strike before the safety of the refugees.

That there have been many grievous

mistakes is, I am afraid, beyond question. But there have also been wonderful successes. The nobility shown, during those days of stress and strain, by all classes of the community has been evident to all. A new spirit has been awakened in East Bengal and it carries forward with it a great inspiration. I have seen with my own eyes poor steamship coal men, themselves housed in wretched hovels, unfit for human habitation, having such sympathy in their hearts for their fellow labourers from Assam in their distress, that they struck work without any thought of the consequences. They are to-day suffering hardships on account of their original act of sympathy. These strikes, as I have already shown, have become terribly complicated, and the motives have been more and more mixed as the strikes have proceeded. Nevertheless I cannot but admire, from the bottom of my heart, the original act of brotherhood, which those labourers on the railway and wharf and steamers exhibited.

The second act of sympathy was in the

town of Chandpur itself. I have mentioned, in a preceding chapter how the townspeople received as their guests the shelterless refugees. All this I need not repeat. It was a wonderful record of hospitality.

The third act of sympathy has been the pure devotion of all the workers, from the doctors down to the youngest volunteers. I long to speak again and again about these workers who have borne the burden and the heat of the day. I desire intensely to render to them something of the praise that they deserve. Just because they have been so silent and self-effacing in their service of love, for that very reason I long to speak openly about it. And yet I feel, at the same time, that they themselves would wish me to keep a certain reserve.

There are some crises in a people's history, when the struggle for existence bears a selfish and a sordid character. There are other times, when an advance appears to be made by some singular stroke of good fortune. But this crisis, through which we have been passing in East Bengal, is of a different character. It is

surely an instance in which a disaster and a misfortune have been turned into a triumph by the enthusiasm of sacrifice alone. Without this devoted love for the poor, so universally shown throughout the present trouble, the whole event would have been a defeat. Now it is a victory.

To some, the crudity of much that has been done will loom large,—the prolonging of the strikes that prevented repatriation, the tyranny not infrequently exercised during the *Hartals*, the disputes and jealousies, the exaggerations in the public press which have made sober people hardly know what to believe. I am not ignorant of, or blind to, all these; rather, I would frankly admit them. But I cannot look upon these as anything but superficial, in comparison with the sacrifice which has flowed in so full and deep a current beneath. It is the central current of life that matters, more than the froth and foam that floats upon the surface.

We were tired indeed when we got on board the 'Beluchi' with the last contingent of the Chandpur refugees. Some of the

volunteers had been ill and had still gone on working. A large proportion had been away from their homes for nearly a month. Through that time all of them had become daily familiar with death. It had been a terrible ordeal. But they went through it untiring to the end.

I have seen the figures of the Sanitary Commissioner as to the mortality ; but my own impression is that the death-roll was really greater than he has estimated. Very many refugees concealed their sicknesses altogether. There were instances of people suddenly dying in the camp, who had never been reported sick at all. I do not think that the mortality can have been much less than 15 per cent, or roughly one in seven of the refugees—an awful proportion for a single month. There were mothers who had lost their children. There were children who had lost both father and mother.

One of our difficulties was to make provision for the children and the babies who were motherless. The sickness was, of course, far, far greater than the

mortality. Pneumonia, developed in an epidemic form as well as cholera. I noticed, again and again, the hard hacking coughs which so many of them had and the sound of this cough went on all night on board the steamer. Many more than I like to think of will bear the marks of their suffering to their dying day. All that this entailed of tender care and nursing may be easily imagined. Night nursing had to be done as constantly as day nursing. The quarters which were occupied by the volunteers were often crowded and always uncomfortable, owing to the want of proper accommodation. Meals had to be taken at irregular hours. But there was no grumbling from first to last.

Indeed, there was a cheerfulness of youth that was infectious; and in the end this cheerfulness aroused the patients in the different hospitals and also the people living in the camp. For there is a contagion which spreads from young life: and this contagion fortunately spread throughout the camp as the days went by

and did much to bring the cholera to an end. The same refugees, who had raised an almost sepulchral cry of "Gandhi Maharaj ki jai," when I first saw them, uttered quite a respectable shout when they were passing the villages on the river bank during their return journey; yet it must be confessed that, even to the last, their voices could not be called robust.

Well, it is all over,—that terrible strain! There are still a few hundred who have not come down from Karimganj; but I feel certain that their removal will not prove difficult. Nevertheless the greatest care will be needed about it, and the deadlock concerning the steamer for the repatriation must not be allowed to occur over again. Here, in Calcutta, the past, which we have just been through, seems like a nightmare. Life is again becoming normal.

There is one serious danger remaining. The public must not think for a moment, that all the work is over. On the contrary, they must understand that some of the very hardest work yet remains to be done.

Unless decent conditions are provided for these helpless refugees, on their arrival in their own homes; unless the Congress Committee and Seva Samitis look after them carefully, in the different centres to which they have gone,—such as Gorakhpur, Basti, Bilaspur, Ganjam, etc.—they will most certainly drift back once more up to the tea gardens of Assam and begin life there over again, in spite of all the hardships of their past experience.

I have witnessed an exact parallel to this, in the case of Fiji returned emigrants; and I know how easy it will be for this very disaster of Fiji to be repeated. For this reason, I am starting immediately for the Gorakhpur District in order to see with my own eyes, what can be done.

When I was in Chandpur, it was necessary to decide as to which of the two duties was the more important work—to remain for the Karimganj labourers, or to go on to Gorakhpur and other places and see them settled. Those I consulted, all regarded the latter as the more immediately urgent duty to be performed. For

that reason I am intending to start, if possible, to-night.

In conclusion, it is difficult to express the gratitude I feel to the Press for the way in which it has supported this vindication of humanity. The autocratic methods of the Bengal Government officials and their reliance upon brute force have been exposed. It has been shown clearly that the year 1921 in no way differs essentially from the year 1919. The so-called Dyarchy has been proved up to the hilt to be the old Autocracy over again, dressed up in a new garment. In no single matter was Indian opinion in the Council, or of the Executive, of the slightest account in influencing the *actions* of Sir Henry Wheeler. I am taking the test, which the new Viceroy has laid down, and am judging Sir Henry Wheeler by actions, rather than by professions. A situation, which should have been dealt with primarily by the Ministry of Health, was taken in hand by the Home Department and decided by the Home Member. In Darjeeling, I was not introduced to a single Indian Minister

for the purpose of consultation. The whole matter appeared to be settled by Lord Ronaldshay, Sir Henry Wheeler, and Mr. Donald,—three of my own countrymen.

I do not charge Sir Henry Wheeler or Lord Ronaldshay with consciously and deliberately slighting their Indian colleague; but I do say that the mentality of the Autocracy at Darjeeling is still unchanged, and that the ‘responsible Government’ promised by the Reforms Act—by which ought to be meant *respect for Indian opinion and Indian initiative*,—is still almost entirely absent. We shall see, when the Council meets in July, what will happen. There will be some resolutions, to which the Government will give the usual explanations. There will be some questions, to which the Government will give the usual answers. And so the tragi-comedy will go on.¹

But I had not intended to speak of politics at all. The mention of the services rendered by the Press has led me on to do

1. This prophecy was almost literally fulfilled.

so ; and I will leave what I have written as it stands, as merely an impatient outburst on a subject which is beyond my province. What I would ask of the Press, as I would ask of the Indian public, is this, that the whole matter of repatriation should in no sense be allowed to remain only half-finished. I trust, therefore, that the same publicity will be given to what I am able to find out at Gorakhpur and Bilaspur and Basti, as was given to the earlier situation at Chandpur and Goalundo. And I most earnestly trust that the vernacular papers will also carry the whole subject with full publicity through its final stages. These are now two-fold. First and foremost, of course, is the repatriation of the remaining hundreds who are stranded at Karimganj ; secondly, there is the duty of following up the repatriated refugees to their own homes. Might I venture to suggest that public appeal should be immediately issued and circularised by the different provincial leaders in the different provinces, calling attention to the urgency of the work and the greatness of the need ? The provinces

chiefly affected are those of Behar, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, Madras and Bengal itself. From these the tea-garden labourers have been taken and to these they have now returned.²

2. It will be seen from the Introduction that the work of repatriation was successfully carried out at Gorakhpur and Basti, but there was some failure at Bilaspur.

THE SPIRIT OF EAST BENGAL

I wish to continue, if I may, the narrative of events and to explain in my own way, by illustrations and impressions, what has been happening. As I go on with my story, I shall have to shift the scene of the drama from Chandpur to Chittagong. I shall try to describe the spirit of the common people in that town, where the different classes have become united in an extraordinary manner.

But before doing this, I should like to go back once more to Chandpur itself and relate something further about the service of the poor which I have witnessed. For there has been one effect of the new national movement, which has revealed itself to my own mind more and more convincingly every day. Briefly, it is this. The new devotion to the service of the poor has sprung directly from the national

call itself. 'BandeMataram' has not been a mere watchword to be shouted along the streets; it has become an inspiration of the daily life.

This new spirit is truly great. Its fearlessness and sincerity are manifest. It is deeply marked among the young men whom I have seen. They have found their own souls at last. Their true nature has come to the surface. Among the women, also (who have everywhere left their retirement to meet me, as one who has learnt to love their country), this new spirit is stronger even than among the men. The mothers are imparting it to their children, and the tiniest child seems able to receive it.

I have seen this spirit sweeping forward like a flood tide, purifying away a thousand servilities which were the fruit of long subjection. It is striking to me to look back and remember, how, in the extreme west of India, in isolated Sind, I have seen the same spirit being manifested that I have witnessed in East Bengal. Indeed, it would be equally true to say,

that I have seen it in Maharashtra and in Gujarat, in the Punjab and in Hindustan. Though I have not recently been down to Madras, I have no doubt whatever that I should meet it there also. There is one personality alone that has produced it and with all its short-comings it still breathes Mahatma Gandhi's spirit.

The oppression of the poor in India, which has been such a blot upon the past, shows signs of being overcome at last by this new spirit. That is the reason why it fills my heart with gladness.

The millions of the depressed classes, the outcastes, the untouchables, have been the cause of India's downfall. They have dragged India down to the dust. It is the rescue, by loving service, of these millions, which will give to India a resurrection—a new life and a new birth.

Let me tell the story, very simply, of the death of the Marwari manager, Gaurishanker Mertia,—one of those young men of this new India, who had seen the vision of loving service amid a daily round of business. The famished and distressed

tea garden labourers came to his door at Chandpur, where he was managing the concerns of the large Marwari firm of 'Surajmall Nagormall & Co'. He was one of the first to respond and to open his door wide. Every spare moment of his time he spent in the cholera camp, trying to meet the needs of the sick and dying. His own home became the residence of nearly twenty workers. He fed them all, day after day, and looked after their comfort. Then, as the strain began to tell upon him, he himself became a prey to cholera. In the weakness and suffering of the disease, he still thought only of the poor. His last act was to order the distribution, from his own funds, of garments for every one of the children. When the little children wore these clothes for the first time with great delight, they little knew that their benefactor had died that very day. His last uttered words were for the welfare of the children. This is the spirit of service, which the new call of the Motherland has awakened.

Let me turn, for a moment, from the

tragedy of that portrait to another picture which is brimming over with the laughter and joy of childhood. On my way back from Goalundo to Chandpur, after visiting Darjeeling, our boat was tied up for the night at a village which was on the banks of one of those mighty rivers of East Bengal. I had scarcely landed, when all the young boys and young girls of the place, down to the very smallest, flocked around me with shouts of happiness; the elder boys formed themselves into a procession, while the little children ran by my side laughing with joy and gladness. I was taken up to their village in triumph with the shouts of 'Bande Mataram.'

It was noticeable that almost every one who was with me in the procession was quite young. The elder people seemed to hold aloof. Then I found out the reason. For although the enthusiasm of the young people of the village was so great, the leading zamindar sent word to me to ask me not to hold any meeting within the bounds of his estate, because he feared Government displeasure. He was an old man and, in a very weak

state of health,—so ill that he could not see me. I very gladly obeyed him and wished to remain quietly in the village. But the young people would not allow this for a moment. Very quickly, they brought me about half a mile outside the village to a boundary line, where the zamindar's estate ended. All the way along the road, the shouts were unceasing; and when we had passed the boundary line, we had our delightfully enthusiastic meeting. I told them some stories about Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa. At last we went back to the village, as happy as kings.

It was possible, in all this, to see a vivid picture of the contrast between the old and the new. The new spirit filled the children. To-day, it is like the new wine that bursts the old bottles. It is bubbling over.

What has further impressed me, in East Bengal, is the determination—which tends to become the reckless determination—of the people. Like one of the sudden storms, which sweeps down over the surface of the broad rivers of that country, and lashes the waters into fury, even so when

I came to Chandpur the storm of indignation was sweeping over the spirit of the people; their anger appeared to be carrying everything before it. This was the one aspect, which immediately struck my notice, when I first landed. This sudden outburst of feeling is clearly a mark of character and temperament in these parts. It may lead to singular acts of pure devotion; it may also lead to acts of sudden and unaccountable violence.

I will give yet another illustration. The scene must be transferred to Chittagong. Towards the end of my stay there, one of the Indian leaders said to me, "Brother, we must dine with the sweepers before you go. I am a Brahman, and it will be the true act of a Brahman to do so." I need hardly say that his words were a great joy to me, and I cordially accepted the invitation. What I at once noticed was the eagerness of all the young people to have their share in the preparations. Everything was done by the boys and young volunteers. The cooking itself was performed by them and the meal was got ready.

At first, we were extremely anxious, because our guests had not arrived. They came forward at last, with great shyness, but the young boys soon made them at their ease. We went round and embraced them. Then they sat down with us side by side. We gave them food from our own plates and did everything we could to make our guests feel quite at home. The boys' enthusiasm gradually broke down every barrier; and at last we saw all the sweeper boys talking freely away (as only boys can talk) with the boys who had prepared the food,—the sons of Brahmans and high caste people. Among the children at least every sign of race distinction had been forgotten.

Such a new spirit, in the younger generation, will carry India very far. The joy of adventure was strong in those boys, and they were gladdened exceedingly at the privilege of doing this act of service. It was one and the same with the acts of service to the poor, which were being daily performed by the volunteers in the cholera camp at Chandpur.

I find that there is one more narrative, which I must tell, to make my meaning perfectly clear. On the first day of my arrival at Chittagong, a public meeting was held in the open air, in one of nature's amphitheatres. A high bank of grass in the background formed an excellent sitting place for thousands of people. The appeal was on behalf of the distressed and stranded labourers at Chandpur, and it was stated that they were in need of clothing. In a moment, the air was white with shawls and upper garments, which were thrown forward towards the platform. For a few seconds, as those on the grassy amphitheatre stripped off their upper garments and threw them forward, the sight had almost the appearance of a fall of snow, so white it looked.

The sacrifice which was shown at that meeting had a powerful effect upon my own mind and I know that others felt it also. What every one experienced was a sudden kindling at the heart with joy to be present at such an auspicious moment. So intense was the psychological impression,

that those who had come, never intending to give, gave lavishly. They could not resist the wave of public feeling. The mass enthusiasm carried them beyond their conventional ideas.

That night, when I had retired to rest and was thinking it all over alone, I felt certain that I had been given a glimpse of insight into the hearts of the people of East Bengal who have lived (as their ancestors lived before them), in the presence of these great rivers and who have done their business, as the Psalmist says, 'beside great waters.' They have had to face dangers of storm and flood from childhood, and they have learnt to rely upon one another. I could feel their hearts beating warmly with love, and it touched me very deeply indeed. My own nature is impulsive, and I did not find it difficult to respond to their affection.

Yet, at the same time, a dread has not infrequently possessed me. In no part of India,—not even in the Punjab—have I ever felt the danger of an actual outbreak of violence so near at hand as in East

Bengal. Hitherto, this danger has been overcome even here. But violent speeches are being uttered, in spite of Mahatma Gandhi's warning. Strikes and *hartals* are springing up irresponsibly in spite of Mahatma Gandhi's prohibition. And so the question, that I have been asking myself with great anxiety, is,—“Can the movement here be kept throughout free from violence of any kind?” Passionately I desire and pray that it may; but I cannot help asking the question anxiously.

And while I ask this anxious question, I long and pray at the same time, that these present strikes may speedily come to an end. Whatever steps may be taken to meet the wants of the moment, the poor always suffer, where strikes are long drawn out. There is a Bengali proverb which says, “When great kings go to war, it is the grass that is trodden under foot.” The great ‘Kings’ of the National Movement, on the one hand, and of the Government, on the other, are now the combatants. But the poor people, who are like the grass.

are in danger of being trodden down by both parties.

My heart's prayer is that such a disaster as this may never be allowed to happen. My prayer is that those whose new-found zeal and enthusiasm is so great, and who have so warmly welcomed the poor into their midst, may carry out their service of love to the very end. My heart's longing is that they may do their utmost to set free the poor from the suffering of these present strikes and hartals and thus speedily provide for the complete repatriation of the refugees from Assam.

THE STRIKES

CHAPTER I

I wish, if possible, to make my own position perfectly clear about the strikes. I have never for a moment doubted that the labourers employed at the riverside, and the railway workmen of the Assam Bengal Railway, and also, in a great measure, the steamship labourers, were actuated mainly and chiefly at the original moment, by an overwhelming impulse of indignation, which carried them away with passionate emotion on behalf of the Assam tea garden labourers. They saw with their own eyes these fellow labourers so beaten and wounded by the Gurkhas, and so callously treated by Government officials that they could not endure it. This emotion was entirely spontaneous, and it represented what might be called a national

feeling. What the *country* felt as a whole was felt by these labourers in particular. It was a righteous indignation. It was in its own way noble. And I should be the very last to condemn it. How could I? I have said again and again till I am tired of saying it that I care for humanity, not for politics. And I should be a poor specimen of a humanitarian if my heart did not respond to such an outburst of human indignation, not among the leisured and cultured classes, but among the masses of the working people, with whom I have spent the best part of my life, and whose sorrows have been my sorrows. Therefore, there can be no question with me about the original motive. I was there on the spot, and I shared it. Everything that I have written will show how deeply I shared it.

But it is one thing to feel an emotion, and it is another thing to act wisely and thoughtfully. If this great national movement is simply to be swayed by emotion; if it is to have no steadying power of quiet, concentrated thought behind it, then it will certainly lose its

balance. For emotion, uncontrolled, is always near the edge of the precipice of violence. That is why Mahatma Gandhi has definitely ruled out of his present programme the encouragement of local labour strikes. The most precious spiritual weapon which Mahatma Gandhi has given to the national movement is *Ahimsa*. Local leaders must not, at the present stage of the movement, encourage sporadic, local strikes. For, almost inevitably, they must lead, in the end, to *Himsa*. That is my own reading of Mahatmaji's position. That is why I believe, he spoke so strongly at Karachi. If I am wrong, I am most gladly open to correction.

I would wish my readers to remember, that what I say about violence with regard to strikes is not based on theory, but on practice. For I was in the very midst of the Lillooah Strike, and saw with my own eyes the violence of those labourers in Howrah who were under the bitter pangs of hunger. It was by nothing less than a miracle that further bloodshed was not committed. I am speaking of very recent events, which

everyone knows. The non-violent character of the national movement was every day, (nay, every hour) in danger, so long as the Howrah—Lillooah Strike continued. Surely then I am justified in speaking about this matter, when my whole time, for weeks together, has been spent in trying to bring to an honorable settlement these railway workshop strikes which were being prolonged, for months and months, while poor women and children literally starved and poor labourers looked on with hungry and almost maddened eyes. I have watched the nobility of endurance among the railway labourers, and how wonderfully they helped one another; my heart gone out to them in a way that no words could express. But the determination has entered like iron into my soul, that, if possible these futile outbreaks which have brought no gain to any one ought not to be repeated. It is we, the educated, who ought to suffer. We ought not to make the poor the sufferers.

I want to correct another misunderstanding. It would be an absurd mistake to

imagine, that I have ever said (or ever could say) that all strikes are "wrong." I have taken part in strikes; and I am proud of the fact. I trust, that I have done so with love and not with retaliation in my heart. To my thinking, Non-co-operation itself is a gigantic Strike. It is simply a National Strike against injustice. One of my very dearest friends struck against me one day, long ago, when I was young. He said to me "If you do that again, I shall refuse to speak to you," and I knew he meant it. I was actually committing sin. His words pulled me up suddenly, and I saw the sin and was saved. How can I, then, be against strikes, when I have been saved from sin by a strike?

But when we come to these special strikes at Chandpur and Goalundo the question arises at once,—“Are they wise? Are they opportune? Are they really helping the poor refugees?” and these questions were easy to answer on the spot. The fact was, they were hindering, not helping. They were most inopportune. They were very unwise. Let me show this by two examples.

First of all, every one knew that there were 800 to 1,000 refugees stranded at Karimganj, waiting to come down. Karimganj is a tiny place, and the local leaders were almost desperate, hardly knowing how to support them any longer. They sent piteous telegrams to us. Obviously, the one thing was to get the refugees, who were already at Chandpur, right on their way home as quickly as possible, and then to bring down the later refugees from Karimganj. But what has been the result of the continued railway and steamship strike? Why, simply this! The refugees at Karimganj *are still there*; and we shall have to appeal to the pity of European engine-drivers and European steamship men to get them down at all, simply because the strikers will not help to do so. Even the Chandpur refugees, at last, had to be brought away by a European crew, who were not helped, even to coal the vessel, by the Indian steamship strikers. So utterly topsy-turvy had things become, that those who set out in the first instance to sympathise with the refugees, were

afterwards refusing to help the refugees even by coaling a steamer for them.

But the second example will show the exact state of things best of all. Before the steamship strike began I pleaded earnestly on behalf of the refugees, "For God's sake, let these poor cholera-stricken people be taken away first before the strike begins." That very day, (with the unanimous will and support of every local leader in Chandpur) we had placed nearly four hundred persons on board a 'flat,' which was to carry them to the steamer, for transportation to Goalundo. I pleaded the whole morning against the steamship strike on that day. It was all in vain. In the afternoon, I was told that the strike was absolutely certain to come off. My advice was not taken in the least. So I had to give the order for these 400 refugees to be sent back again into the cholera camp. The women went weeping; the men were sullen and angry.

These things did not happen once. They happened again and again, in the course of the struggle. We were continually

being hampered by these strikes while trying to get the Assam tea garden labourers away. We were constantly prevented from so doing.

But the worst has not yet been told.

It must not be forgotten for a moment, that Chandpur was a cholera stricken place. We were faced every day with an outbreak of cholera on an immensely large scale. It was almost certain to extend to the town and villages. We had to save human life and every human life was precious. But if we were to save human life from cholera, then we had all to work together. When a sudden flood comes, on a great river in East Bengal, and a tiger and an antelope are together on a piece of land that is being washed away, they forget their differences in face of the common danger. But here were we, not helping together in every way to beat down the common danger of the cholera, but actually stopping our medicinal supplies and our national volunteers and our new workers coming to our aid by means of these strikes. This happened, again and

again, and it was all on account of the railway and steamship strikes. The poor felt the pinch of hunger just at the time they should have been well nourished, if they were successfully to resist a cholera attack. The tanks were polluted; but the chloride of lime was stopped on its way by the strikes. We had to rely on the Government stores and on Government transportation; we were subjected to a hundred needless difficulties.

THE STRIKES

CHAPTER II

I am very far from condemning the railway men altogether for all that happened. I know well that things bordering on violence happen in every strike; and that is why I always feel that the strike is a most dangerous non-co-operation weapon, when non-violence is of the very essence of the movement. I know well that, in this rough and tumble world, we shall always have much to find fault with in the actions of working men, who are desperate. The cleanest strike I have been in lately was the Lucknow Railway workshop strike (after the first three days); but even in this strike, there was a certain amount of intimidation though there was no violent outbreak. The discipline there was wonderful, and the men obeyed orders like

a regiment on parade. They placed their *pagris* at the feet of those who wished to go to work, they placed their foreheads in the dust at their feet, but if they went to work after that,—well, they went. There was no prevention, and no open act of intimidation.

To-day my own earnest desire as a humanitarian is this, that in this strike the men should not go on holding out for that which cannot be given, namely, the gratuity which is given for unbroken railway service. They cannot get it. The Railway Boards, as I know for certain, will not and cannot allow it; and to me, it appears that no point of honour is concerned in it. I can admire the men all the more if their sympathy with their fellow working men from Assam was so great that they struck knowing that they would forfeit their gratuity. But my admiration is discounted at once if, afterwards, they insist on the gratuity being given back again. It would then appear that they were not ready to sacrifice it after all.

I am not passing any final judgment.

They are working men after all, not logicians. The heart is far more with them than the head. And I can understand, full well, the bitterness of losing, what is called among them, their, 'bakshish' I have fought for its nonforfeiture, hour after hour, with Agent after Agent and also with the Railway Board at Simla, because I knew what value these illiterate working men placed upon it. But I confess that there was one thing, that weighed with me. As a sympathiser with non-cooperation, I could not myself have touched that 'bakshish' with my little finger; and it was only my weakness which made me plead for it at all. For, this system of 'Bakshish' is one of slavery. It is the means by which the railway men are bound down never to go on strike. The gratuity is given on the one condition, that the men never strike under any provocation.

Let me give an illustration to show how it is, in every way, a badge of slavery. The gratuity is given only at the end of 15 years' unbroken service;

and a 'strike' breaks the service. Suppose a railway man has served fourteen years and ten months. Suppose further that just before he reaches his fifteenth year, he is treated like a dog by his employer. This goes on day after day. Yet if he 'strikes,' or comes out on 'strike' on behalf of a brother workman, he forfeits all his 15 years 'gratuity.' And so he does not strike, simply to get his 'bakshish.' It is an appropriate name, therefore, this name of 'bakshish!' It is degrading, because it leads inevitably to servitude.

I have been doing my utmost to get this evil system replaced by a Provident Fund system, in which even the most casual daily labourer can participate. Bakshish is demoralising: Provident Fund leads to self-respect. For the Provident Fund would not be forfeited by any honourable strike. And the Provident Fund is made up of the man's own provident thrift, as well as the Company's added payment. It is no mere gratuity which can be cancelled at the company's own will and pleasure. I have been working hard to obtain consi-

deration for the extension of the Provident Fund by the Railway Board at Simla, and I believe that the idea behind my suggestion has made progress. If, therefore, the working men on the Assam Railway, ask me, "Shall we go back, without our bakshish?" I should say, with all love and affection, and also with all admiration, for their sacrifice on behalf of the Assam labourers,—“Certainly, my brothers, do not hesitate for a moment! There is no dishonour in it, but rather there is honour! Give up this gratuity once for all, on behalf of the Assam labourers for whom you struck! And, just as you would avoid wine, or some intoxicating drug, even so, in future, avoid this degrading system. No non-co-operating workman, I feel sure, can *touch* it.”

I know that what I have said may appear very hard. But are we not *all* undergoing hardships? Are we not *all* making sacrifices? Are not these very sacrifices leading to our purification, to our inward freedom, to our release from the bonds of slavery, to our true Swaraj?

I would say one last word to the railway working men themselves;—Do not think for one moment, that I do not feel for you, my brothers. If I could,—if God permitted me,—I should be sharing your own hard daily toils. I wish I could endure your own fate and your own hardships, in order that I might be able to prove to you that my words are words of sincerity and love, and not cold, unfeeling words of aloofness. But I cannot be a labourer with my hands. I have to carry on my own work, which God has given me. Let me tell you, however, that, at Lucknow our workmen went back, after having forfeited their gratuity with jubilation. We embraced one another as each went through the railway gate, with the prayer on our lips.—‘Bande Mataram.’ And so I am praying to God and longing each day, that the distress, and privation, and trouble, of the railway employees in Assam may also be happily ended.

THE STRIKES

CHAPTER III

On reading over, in print, the articles which I had previously written, concerning the strikes, I have had a fear, that I may have entrenched too far on political grounds and entered on the borderland of political controversy. I have felt also, that the tone of my last article was, in a measure, too hard towards the railway men and their leaders in failing sufficiently to appreciate the main motive (which I fully believe underlay the whole strike), namely, indignation concerning the treatment of the Assam-returned labourers. I would again repeat, before concluding what I have to say on the subject, that this motive in itself was a noble one and that it fully deserves the support of the public as a true and genuine impulse. If the men

finally determine to hold out and suffer, then the very fact that they are willing to suffer, for what they feel to be their due as a point of honour, commands my deepest respect ; and I would wish to help them in any way I could even though I could not see eye to eye with them as to the wisdom of their action. I could hardly expect them to look upon the 'gratuity' question (which is the one real point at issue) in the light that I have come personally to regard it owing to more than half a life-time's experience of labour questions. It is scarcely possible for them at once to understand, that there are really degrading conditions attached to it and that it binds the conscience of those who put themselves under its control. It is very hard indeed for them to see, that it can hardly be a point of honour to cling to it at this time. Yet that is the position they appear to have taken up. Let me explain the matter once more, in order to become perfectly plain. The Agents of the Railway Companies have freely acknowledged on more than one occasion that the gratuity is in

effect a 'strike insurance' bonus; that its main and principal object is to bind men down so that they should not strike at all. Surely then its acceptance is a definite sacrifice of freedom. I can assure all my Indian readers, that such a 'strike insurance' bonus would not be allowed for a single moment by any organised trades union in England. For, just as freedom to employ certain persons is the legitimate right of the employer of labour, so freedom to refuse employment (e.g., to strike) is the legitimate right of the employee. I can give an example of its working. Suppose a certain industrial company deliberately refused to put up the price of wages in proportion both to the increased cost of living and to the increase of their own profits. This would become what in England would be called a "sweated industry." But suppose most of the older men engaged in this industry were drawing nigh to the time when they should receive their gratuity. Is it not practically certain, that the trades union leaders, (who would be naturally found, in a longstanding organisation,

among the older and more experienced men) would vote against a strike, because they would know that if they called for a strike, they would lose their own personal gratuity. There could hardly be found a more clever invention on the part of the capitalists than this bribery, which appeals more and more each year to the older men and makes them take the side of the employer against the just claims of labour.

In the past, when the 'strike' weapon was practically unknown and unused in India, the evils of the 'gratuity' system were not understood. But now that Labour is at last asserting its rights, and claiming to be treated with respect on equal terms with capital, it is high time that this gratuity question shall be faced once for all by every trades union and labour union and railway union. I have found this gratuity system almost universal in one form or another, and also very popular with the working men themselves. It will not be possible to change the system in a moment, and the greatest sympathy is needed for those men who are still under

it and eagerly expecting its benefits. It was for this reason, that I put on one side my own strong opinion about it (which I have explained to the working men themselves on every possible occasion) and pleaded for the men both before the different Railway Agents and the Railway Board that at the present time the gratuity should not be forfeited. I pleaded for the railway men in this respect also even before the Assam Railway authorities, but in this case the men's position was weakened by the fact, that they had struck work only twenty days before and that distinct public warning had been given them on that earlier occasion, that any further breach of service would not be condoned. What I would now ask of the railway men and also of the leaders is, whether it is really a point of honour to stand out for this at all; whether it is not better to go back without it and be free from its actual bondage. For, it is as certain as certain can be, that this question of gratuity will always stand in the way, in the future, even if it is given back now as the railway men have

desired. My point is this,—would it not be better, just as the other railway men, who have struck, have now gone back without their gratuity, and yet have not felt any loss of personal honour in doing so,—would it not be better, to lay emphasis on other things, such as provident fund benefit, and no victimisation, and demand rather that all who went on strike should be taken back, than that the gratuity should be returned ?

This is my own opinion, and my own most earnest advice. If my advice is not taken, on political grounds, and it is felt that national honour is at stake in this question, then I fully agree with a speaker at a recent meeting that it is quite likely that I as a practical Englishman, may not see things in the same light as an Indian Nationalist, however, dearly I may have learnt to love India as the Motherland of my adoption. For it is quite true, and I have always recognised the fact, that the adopted child can never be the same as the child who is born in a family. For this obvious cause I have never taken active

part in Indian politics, but have tried to confine my energy as closely as possible to humanitarian work. But the strikes have two aspects. On the one hand they may become political issues. On the other hand, they may be regarded from the point of view of the misery and suffering to the poor which they are almost certain to cause, especially if undertaken without experience. It was this second reason which made me anxious to help, and if I have overstepped that humanitarian boundary, I must ask pardon for doing so. It must be remembered at what pressure I have been working and writing lately ; it has been hard to write or think without some danger of being misunderstood at such a time of pressure.

I would ask those who, in this matter of the strikes, have been obliged to take a different view from mine, to believe me when I state that I fully and sincerely appreciate their motive and that I do not in any way at all desire to depreciate it. I would ask them equally to believe in the sincerity of my own motive in having.

written and acted as I have done. We have to learn one of the most difficult of all things, in a time of great emotional excitement such as that in which we are now, namely, to continue deeply to respect one another and to retain friendship and comradeship one with another, even when we may be compelled by our conviction of the truth, as we see it, to take different points of view on a great public issue.

APPENDIX I

THE INQUIRY COMMITTEE

Mr. C. F. Andrews examined by the Inquiry Committee on 8th June said:—I arrived at Chandpur on the evening of Saturday, the 21st May. I had some difficulty in landing at Chandpur, the Military Police prevented my friends from coming on board the steamer to welcome me. It was only after making a protest against this that I was able to get permission for one of them to come on board. During the interval a police officer—an English police officer, gave me his own version of the events of the two previous nights. He spoke of rough handling by the Gurkhas of the Tea garden coolies on the previous night while giving his own explanation.

On Sunday morning at about 8 o'clock some five or six injured persons were brought before

94 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

me. I examined their injuries, The first one I examined was a little girl about eight or nine years old who was seriously wounded just below the bottom of the right eye. The wound had the appearance of a surface cut and bruise. It was blue in colour with red marks. It seemed to me as though it might have been done,—

(At this stage the President of the Committee interrupted and put the following question to the witness.)

Q.—Did you touch the wound with your fingers at all?

A.—No.

Q.—Having regard to the fact that you did not touch the wound and did not examine the wound in any other way except by looking at it, may I take it that you could not tell, how deep the wound was?

A.—I got a clear impression by my sight and I do not think the wound was a deep one.

Q.—Did you have any medical training?

A.—None whatever.

Q.—If a medical man who examined and dressed the wound says that the wound was a puncture one and it was caused by a pointed weapon would you place much reliance on your own judgment after examination with your eye sight?

A.—Of course, I would trust the medical man's evidence in such a matter.

Q.—You have expressed an opinion in the Press that you saw no bayonet wounds. You do not assert that you looked at all the wounded coolies?

A.—No, certainly not. I only gave my opinion from the five or six persons whom I saw. The second wounded person I remember was a woman, I think of about middle age, but I am not sure. I remember her wound was a scalp wound on her head and another on one of her arms. I forget which arm. My further recollection is rather vague. There was certainly another woman and one of the remainder was a man past middle age. I cannot remember exactly what the wounds of these were. But I know I regarded them as slight wounds among those persons that were shown to me. I do not remember any one who had a broken bone. My most vivid recollection was the wretched appearance of those poor people—the misery depicted in their faces. That made upon me a very vivid impression which still remains in my mind.

Q.—You say these coolies had a wretched appearance and misery depicted in their faces. Did they look like well fed persons?

A.—No.

Q.—Could they have got into that condition by travelling long distances in the course of three or four days. I want you to answer this question having special regard to their physical condition as you saw it?

A.—I saw the whole body of the coolies that morning and I would rather speak of the condition of the whole number than of these few individuals. My impression was that it would have been quite impossible for the great majority to have reached the emaciated condition in which they were in a few days. I had the opportunity of seeing a large number in addition to those at Chandpur and my general impression of them also was the same. There was a certain proportion of them who appeared strong and vigorous, but it was a small proportion out of the whole number. I have written my impressions of the first morning at Chandpur for the press, and I can give you a copy of that if you so desire.

Q.—What was the proportion roughly of women and children among the coolies?

A.—My impression is that there was a very large number of children up to the age eight or nine years. There were very few youths whose age might be from twelve to twenty. The large

number of the women impressed me very much, but this may have been due to the fact that they immediately came towards me when they saw me to make prostration. What I mean is this that the women crowded to me everywhere. Some of whom I saw were very nearly naked.

Q.—Can you tell us whether these coolies—men, women and children,—looked as if they could offer any kind of a fight to a number of people who wanted them to vacate a place ?

A.—What I saw on that first morning made it quite clear to me that they could not possibly have offered any serious physical resistance and they certainly had not the heart to do it. I can imagine them making a mad rush for the steamer in order to get away, but I cannot possibly imagine them physically resisting armed soldiers. Some of those I saw seemed hardly to have strength to drag themselves from one place to another.

Q.—Did you see any children in arms who could not walk among the coolies ?

A.—Yes, I have a very clear impression that quite a large proportion of the women had children in their arms. I can give exact evidence on this point because on that first morning at the large encampment when the women came forward they brought their

children with them and placed their babies' heads to touch my feet. I noticed that a very large number had children in arms. Very few indeed were without children. There were very tiny babies 2 or 3 months old.

I saw one woman in the hospital who was near to child-birth and I remember that one or two who came to watch me were near to child-birth also.

Q.—Apart from the men, could you say from their appearance whether these women with babies could offer any resistance to a number of men who wanted to push them out of a place?

A.—I could not possibly imagine these women whom I saw offering any serious resistance whatever.

Q.—From what you know of the character of these women, could you tell us whether they would or would not be frightened at the very sight of the sepoys or Gurkhas or men in European dress?

A.—I should think they would be terribly frightened.

APPENDIX II

INDICTMENT OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE LEADERS OF THE PEOPLE

The following is Mr. Andrews' statement before a crowded audience at Calcutta :—

I must ask you to bear with me to-day if I do not speak for long as I am very tired ; and I must ask your permission to go away as soon as my address is finished. I have overtaxed my strength. At the very opening I wish to correct certain mistakes, which have unfortunately appeared in the press. First of all, I was reported to have said, that the Bengal Government had refused to "allow" the Assam Labourers to go forward. I could not have said anything so foolish, as I myself sent away 483 with the full permission of the Bengal Government. What I said was that the Bengal Government refused to help. Secondly, on the authority of all the officials at Chandpur, I stated in the press that the Bengal Government

100 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

strictly prohibited concession rates. This was the entire impression of everyone at Chandpur, both official and unofficial alike, and I myself sent away these 483 persons at full rates because I could not get concession rates. I now understand from Sir Henry Wheeler himself, that he did not prohibit concession rates, but only objected to free passages. I am sorry he did not make his meaning more explicit to his own officials, for that one mistake in the official communications has probably been the cause of many lives being lost. Thirdly, I have read a statement in the press, that in the rush forward to get on the steamer some persons were pushed into the river and were drowned. This was not the case. It has been also stated, that bayonets were used by the Gurkhas. As far as I have been able to find out, this did not happen. This picture here also, which is exhibited does not correspond with any facts which I have seen. No Englishman would ever flog a woman. The evils and miseries of the present crisis are dark enough without making them still darker.

On looking back after the event, I blame myself now for not having gone to Chandpur earlier. My only excuse is, that I had been asked by the working men themselves at Kanchrapara to help them in the settlement of

their strike with the Railway Company and I felt that I could not leave that duty half finished. But if I had known all the truth about Chandpur I should certainly have asked permission from the Kanchrapara workmen to leave them earlier. If I had only arrived at Chandpur two days earlier the Gurkhas might not have been called in and the Gurkha outrage might not have occurred and a settlement might have been reached. But these things cannot be foreseen.

When at last I arrived in Chandpur, I found that the rule of the military and police prevailed. The police officer refused to give permission to the friends (who had come to welcome me) to enter on board the steamer. Meanwhile the police officer gave me his own version of the story of what had occurred the night before. At first, I could not understand the long delay. But my companion, Mr. Kalimohan Ghose, came back to tell me what had occurred at the gangway and how the friends who had come to welcome me had been refused. The police officer spoke in an insulting tone to Mr. Kalimohan Ghose in my presence. I demanded that the order against my Chandpur friends should be immediately withdrawn and this was done.

Late that night, when I reached the house, I

102 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

was told the story of what happened with the Gurkhas on the previous night. The next morning after I arrived some of the victims of the Gurkha outrage were brought before me for inspection. I saw one poor little girl with her left eye injured by a blow, which narrowly missed the eye-ball itself. Two women, if I remember rightly, were also there, one with a bad scalp wound. One weak elderly man present was also wounded. I saw no one among the wounded who could have offered the least resistance. It made my blood hot with indignation to see these pitiable derelicts of humanity, a weak sickly child, half-starved women, and an infirm old man, presented before me with wounds on their bodies which the brutal assault of the Gurkha soldiers had caused. I made many further enquiries during my stay in Chandpur. I began to collect evidence for the non-official investigation. All that I subsequently found out corroborated my first impression, that a wicked and inhuman act had been perpetrated, which the people of India are not likely soon to forget. If I were to describe it in the barest outline, it means that human beings in the last stage of misery and exhaustion, who should clearly have been objects of tenderness and compassion, were assaulted while they were

lying on the railway platform late in the night by Gurkha soldiers. They offered no resistance. Yet weak women and children and feeble old men, who were too infirm to move quickly, were hit over the head and on the body with the butt-ends of rifles and other weapons in order to force them to get up from the ground. I met several Englishmen on my journeys to and from Chandpur who had seen with their own eyes the condition of these poor human wrecks. They expressed to me their indignation at the thought, that Gurkhas could have been turned loose upon them in the middle of the night to drive them from one place to another. When I challenged the Commissioner himself, he acknowledged that he had pulled one Gurkha soldier off with his own hands because he found him beating the people roughly with his weapon. The Commissioner also told me that he had ordered the whistle finally to be blown, because he saw the violence that was being used was too great. This, at least, is an acknowledgment of the assault and some sign of repentance. But the Government press communique by its white-washing account and suppression of the truth reflects no credit upon its author or upon the Government whom he represents.

104 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

My indictment of the Bengal Government, in the name of humanity, is this, that they have oppressed the poor where pity was needed; they have employed violence, where tenderness was required; they have brought down their Gurkha soldiers where human nature itself was calling aloud for sympathy and compassion; they have forfeited the good name of a humane Government. And what is an added injury, when this brutal outrage has been committed, they have called in their Director of Public Information to justify it to the public through the columns of the daily press.

There is a still more serious indictment to follow. What happened, as far as I can read the sequence of events was this: When the first detachment of the returned labourers from Assam came down to Chandpur, the Magistrate, Mr. Sinha, acted in accordance with the dictates of his heart and conscience and sent them forward. He obtained concessions from the steamship company, and, on his own responsibility, spent nearly two thousand rupees on their transportation. Up to this point, the action of Government through its officers was humane and wise. Only one mistake was made. There should have been a medical examination at Chandpur and the sick should have been detained.

But after that first act of Mr. Sinha a sudden change began. The Government of Bengal, living in the planters' stronghold at Darjeeling, with planting interests on every side of them, was confronted by the solid phalanx of the planters' opposition. Any action to assist these labourers to leave Chandpur was represented as "taking sides against the planters". Therefore, the orders were sent from Darjeeling that facilities for departure in the way of assisted passages were not to be given by Government officers.

This influence of the tea-planting industry was as evident as possible to me in Darjeeling itself. It appears still to be paramount to-day. What has been its fatal result? Government has declared its policy. It will provide medical comforts for the wretched tea labourers, who are congested in Chandpur. It will provide food, if necessary, to prevent them from starving. But the one thing it will not do is this: it will not give one pice to assist these labourers to leave Chandpur. Thus the Government has flouted the advice of every official on the spot. It has taken the side of vested interests. It has not taken the side of the poor.

My own demand was the most moderate possible. I did not ask Government to under-

106 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

take the whole responsibility. I asked simply for a subscription of Rs. 500. This has been refused. Government points to the fact that it is giving medical aid and offering food. But all this is futile. What is needed is to get these poor miserable human beings back to their homes. They will never return to the plantations. Wild horses could not drive them back there. They cannot remain where they are. To keep them in cholera-stricken Chandpur, healthy and unhealthy, all jumbled up together, is nothing less than criminal. They must go forward, the healthy ones first, and then the others when they have recovered.

Everyone on the spot agrees on this point. The missionary, the official Englishmen, the non-official Englishmen, all agree on this point. But the Government at Darjeeling has refused to lift one little finger to help a single labourer forward, And so the deadlock has become complete. The whole province of Bengal on its Indian side, is shocked by this Governmental act. The Government, whose first duty should have been to protect the poor, to defend the poor from oppression, to stand up for the rights of the poor, refused, after the issue has been made unmistakably clear, to assist these refugees to reach their destinations.

The indictment of the whole Government of India to-day and not merely of Bengal is simply this. The Government not only of Bengal, but of India, by its actions, has come more and more to side with the vested interests, with the capitalists, with the rich, with the powerful, against the poor and the oppressed. That is the terrible indictment. That is why the poor, in their misery, have flocked to the banner of Mahatma Gandhi, who is himself the poorest of the poor, and who understands his own poor people. That is why they are even beginning to refuse such help as Government itself is still willing to offer.

There was no more fateful sign of these critical days in which we live than that which was told me by an eye-witness at Naihati. These poor Assam-returned labourers were actually starving. The steaming cooked rice was put before them. But when they heard that Government had provided it they refused to touch it. They were frightened lest it might be a plot to bring them back on to the plantations. But when the national workers brought them uncooked rice from the people they were ravenous; they began to eat the hard rice grains uncooked.

This is a new and ominous event in the

108 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

history of British Rule in India. Those who are not in the midst of the revolution which is going on before our eyes, those who are seated amid their office files in Darjeeling will be prudent if they take timely warning.

The Day of Judgment has begun for all. There is now one supreme question which Government will have to face. "Are you on the side of the rich, or are you on the side of the poor? Are you on the side of Mammon or are you on the side of God?"

And I would add one more word before I close. The Day of Judgment has come for the educated leaders of the people of India also. They too will have to face the same issue. "What are these outcastes?" the question will be asked. What are these untouchables? What are these oppressed ryots, crushed down by their landlords, whose misery in the plains has driven them to seek refuge in Fiji and Natal, in Ceylon and in Assam?

It will not be enough to excite the poor in their distress into meaningless strikes. That may add more to their misery. I speak sadly because I have been dealing with strike after strike during the last few months, which have brought very little but misery and starvation to the poor; and at Howrah, at Lilloah, at

Lucknow, at Kancharapara and at Chandpur, I have seen the poor suffer. Even to-day, this Steamship strike at Chandpur and Goalundo which was made against my utmost entreaty, is certain, I am afraid, to bring nothing but further misery and suffering to the Assam labourers themselves. I can only say this with the utmost sadness; for my heart is full of pain. I had collected 400 of these poor labourers together at Chandpur and they had been passed by the Doctor as medically fit; they were waiting in a barge ready to be transported to the steamer in order to be sent back to their homes, when the news was brought to me that the Indian leaders had persuaded the steamship company employees to strike and thus no steamer could sail. So I had to give the order to take these poor labourers back to the cholera infected shores. They wept piteously. It was the last drop in their cup of bitterness. Therefore, I say most earnestly to you who are popular leaders, if you will bear with me; it will not do merely to excite the poor to strike. It will not do indiscriminately to use these strikes (in which the poor are the chief sufferers) as a weapon to bring Government to its knees. Mahatma Gandhi is the friend of the poor. He himself is the poorest of the poor and he

110 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

knows that in such strikes the poor suffer most of all.

While I say this in all sadness, at the same time I have nothing but admiration for the national volunteers who are daily facing death in its most awful form of cholera there at Chandpur. I have nothing but praise and blessing for their zeal which I have witnessed with my own eyes. It has been one of the most cheering things I have ever seen.

Meanwhile, we have to raise at least half a lakh in this time of economic shortage and industrial depression. I appeal to the hearts of the people of Calcutta. I have come from the midst of the misery at Chandpur and I ask you in the name of the sick and the dying, the poor and the helpless, to respond.

SECOND SPEECH AT CALCUTTA

SIR HENRY WHEELER CONDEMNED

I wish to discuss with you first of all Sir Henry Wheeler's report about the Chandpur deadlock. After that I shall give my own personal opinion about the steamship and Railway strikes which have resulted from it.

Sir Henry Wheeler's report is a failure because his visit was far too hurried and his method was far too official for him ever to get a clear perspective of the people's point of view. He could have had the official point of view up at Darjeeling. He did not need to come all the way to Chandpur to get that. The pity was that having made so long a journey, he was then able to make so little use of it. I tried to point out to him (in the very long talk I had with him at Chandpur) that it would have been perfectly easy for doctors and volunteers, for officials and non-officials to work together at Chandpur on behalf of the sufferers, if only the officials had put aside their officialdom and come down to work among the people. But

this they would not do. Instead of this, they held aloof in their own little corner and hardly ever went near the refugees.

Mr. and Mrs. Goring the Missionaries, very soon won the hearts of the national volunteers, because Mr. Goring acted as stretcher bearer for cholera patients and Mrs. Goring nursed the tiny motherless babies as if they had been her own. The Bishop of Assam very rapidly won the hearts of non-co-operators because he worked all day in the cholera camp. His wife too was loved by all the non-co-operating workers because of her pure goodness. Dr. Pemberton, the Railway hospital doctor, was loved by these young non-co-operators from East Bengal because of his wonderful care for his poor patients. But I am sorry to say they all had a very poor opinion of the Commissioner and of the Government Sanitary Officer. Personally, I think, they were hardly fair in their opinion; but to put down their personal dislikes to a deliberate political obstructionist boycott, as Sir Henry Wheeler does in his report, is surely far-fetched.

The non-co-operators agreed in my presence to try to work with Dr. Batra and they tried their hardest. But they could not pull on together. If Dr. Pemberton had been in charge it would have

been a very different matter. They would have gladly worked with him. It was the same with Mr. De, the Commissioner. If Mr. De, on his arrival, had gone down and done some service to the cholera-stricken people, there would have been no lack of co-operation with him. But when after his arrival, he wanted to bring in the Gurkhas in order to overawe the town, the young men's backs were up at once. And when, at dead of night, he cleared every outsider from the Railway station and then turned on the Gurkhas to beat with the butt-ends of their rifles the helpless women and children,—after that, it was difficult to get anyone even to speak with him. As an Englishman I am ashamed to see that Sir Henry Wheeler defends his action. I said a fortnight ago when I saw exhibited in Mirzapur Park a picture of an Englishman hitting a woman, "This could never happen. An Englishman could never hit a woman." But Sir Henry Wheeler gives a list of sixteen wounded people (nine of whom were women and children) and after seeing with his own eyes their wounds, reports that in the circumstances the force used was not excessive. Would he have spoken like that, if they had been English women and English children?

114 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

I have taken these points in Sir Henry Wheeler's report to show how hopelessly he has missed the people's mind. And a Home Member of the Bengal Council who cannot understand the mind of the Bengalee people, whom he governs, is of no use in Bengal to-day.

We are not living in ordinary days. We want those who will give up being officials and be men. In former days, if cholera was raging the first thing that happened was that the English official of the Civil Service was there on the spot night and day, doing doctor's work, doing nurse's work, doing anything to show sympathy and love for the poor. But in this instance the high tradition of the Civil Service of the past appears to have been lost sight of. What could have been more callous than at 11 o'clock at night, to have sent in the Gurkhas? And, after dealing blows right and left on women with babies in their arms, in what place were these poor people, many of whom were sick and ill, to be located? On a bare, open, shelterless football ground, on a cloudy night at the beginning of the monsoon, when rain was threatening.

Sir Henry Wheeler's report mentions that sheds were to be erected. He fails to mention the salient fact that none had been put up; that the football ground was bare of any shelter

and was quite certain to be waterlogged in any heavy rain. It was here that people, sickening with cholera, were to be stationed. Surely this is not the high tradition of the Indian Civil Service !

I have said that Sir Henry Wheeler does not understand the mind of East Bengal. Indeed he does not, if he thinks such actions as happened on that night were worthy of his official approval. How utterly different was the action of the people themselves ! The townspeople of Chandpur came out and found these poor refugees on that piece of open waste ground where the Gurkha soldiers had driven them and they took them immediately into their own quarters. I have seen these refugees living in the very centre of the town. I have seen them drinking out of the town's tanks and being fed day by day by the townspeople. I have seen their little children playing with the little children of Chandpur. From a medical standpoint, the risk was great indeed, but from the humanitarian standpoint, what love and sacrifice it shows ! And I have seen these non-co-operating students, about whom Sir Henry Wheeler speaks as though they would not be won to co-operate for humanity's sake, I have seen them, day after day, co-operating with English

men and English women whom they love. I have seen them ready to worship an English lady for her goodness to the cholera-stricken Indian children in the hospital.

My time is almost taken up, but I wish to say something about the strikes which are like a great burden on my heart. I have felt for these poor refugees from Assam night and day till they have become a part of my own life and it pained me to the quick when they stretched out their hands and asked me to be taken to their homes and I knew that the one and only cause-preventing them was the steamship strike which blocked their way.

I have no question in my own mind that the original motive underlying that strike had something in it that was noble. The wave of indignation which ran through East Bengal was felt most strongly by the working classes. But the leadership at such a time was weak and faltering, and in consequence the poor have terribly suffered. It is not true that no harm was done to the poor by the long delay, day after day, at Chandpur. Not only were there many unnecessary deaths, but there was also demoralisation. To be in a shed, night and day, and be fed and to have nothing else to do, is demoralising; and those who were

nearest to them and served and loved them best, saw with their own eyes the harm that was being done. I could not for one moment agree to the strike when it was begun. I protested against it with all my might before it was begun. I have been protesting ever since.

The men ought to go back and not carry the strike further ; for it is already causing terrible hardship and suffering to the poor. And it was begun unwisely. For more than thirty years I have been intimately connected with labour problems both in England and in India. Labour leaders in England to-day are among my friends. I have lived through the agony of many strikes and I have suffered with the poor. And my experience is this, that the poor suffer most terribly in strikes beyond any conception of the rich. My experience is that the strike is a weapon never to be used lightly ; that a political strike is almost certain to confuse the issues ; that if begun in a wrong way it will end in misery and want to the poor people. It can only be employed with wisdom and foresight that has been won by generations of education and experience ; and that is not yet present here, in this country. I know full well the enthusiasm of the days in which we live and the power of the popular

movement which has now been created. I have lived in the midst of it and have not kept aloof. All my life I have lived with the young and the enthusiasm of the young is my greatest inspiration. But just because my heart is wholly with the young, and with the present popular movement in East Bengal, which youth has inspired, I can urge with all the more force and conviction the need of infinite care, lest we, whose one object is to help the poor, fail in our endeavour, and only injure the poor instead.

This 'strike' weapon is a new weapon and a double edged weapon, as I know full well from my own long experience. Let us not think that by its reckless use we can obtain short cuts to success. That road of short cuts can only in the end lead to violence and even bloodshed. Let us rather keep strictly to the path of 'Ahimsa' which Mahatma Gandhi has marked out.

APPENDIX III

AN INTERVIEW ON THE GURKHA OUTRAGE

Early this morning I interviewed Mr. C. F. Andrews who has come down to Allahabad to seek relief for the returned Assam coolies.

My first question was this :—"Have you seen Reuter's message from England in which a question has been asked in Parliament whether you yourself ought not to be deported to England and prosecuted for sedition on account of your recent speeches in Calcutta ?

"Yes." Mr. Andrews replied. "We must expect these things at the present time. There is a strong element in England to-day which still desires to keep India down by force and to repress all freedom of speech. But I do not think either Mr. Montagu, or the present Viceroy, is likely to give way to the pressure of such people.

"Have you anything to say about the perso-

nal attack on your character as a gentleman, Mr. Andrews ?" I asked.

"My character has been attacked times without number." Mr. Andrews said, laughing, "and I have tried to make it a rule of my life not to reply to such attacks unless it is a direct question of fact that is at issue. In this case, I imagine that the contents of a leading article, in the 'Englishman,' have been telegraphed to England. In that leading article, my action at a Calcutta meeting with reference to a certain picture was misrepresented. As a matter of fact, I took the strongest possible method of condemning that picture, and every one of my audience know that I condemned it wholeheartedly."

"How do you answer the charge of 'Sedition' which is brought against you?" was my next query.

The answer was impressive.

Mr. Andrews said: "The charge is an absurd one. What the Government needs most of all, at the present juncture, is to be told the honest truth by those who are in touch with the people. My life has been lived among the people and during the last three months, I have been with them at very close quarters indeed; for my work has kept me in daily contact with the masses

trying to settle strikes on honourable terms. It has been no easy time and on more than one occasion I have been in a position of great danger while trying to prevent serious mob-violence. If the Government of India cannot be told the truth about my experience among the masses without my being prosecuted for sedition, then we are in a very bad case indeed. But I know it is not so. Indeed I have said first of all quite openly to the Government authorities, whatever I have afterwards spoken in public. I have never concealed anything from them."

Then I asked: What is your opinion about these strikes?

"I am afraid that they have done an immense amount of harm," said Mr. Andrews, "especially to the poor people. I have seen poor people literally starving before my eyes on account of these strikes. For that very reason I have been working day and night towards obtaining an honourable settlement. I have been a poor man and a labour man all my life and a friend of the labouring classes. Therefore I know that strikes are sometimes necessary. But I feel that to-day in India the strike weapon ought only to be most carefully and wisely used, under skilled and capable leadership. Furthermore,

as you know the very centre of my religious faith as a Christian,—the one thing that has drawn me with all my heart to Mahatma Gandhi,—is his teaching and practice, to the uttermost, of *Ahimsa* or non-violence. This I hold to be essentially the teaching of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. I cannot, then, have anything to do with any strikes, which in my opinion, are absolutely certain to lead to mob-violence; except to go down among the strikers as a peace-maker, and do my utmost to come to honourable terms with the employers on their behalf. I am quite prepared to be misunderstood by both parties, but this—that I have told you about *Ahimsa*—is my intense religious faith, and I should be untrue to my deepest religious convictions if I did not act it out in my own life.”

“Do you think, Mr. Andrews,” I asked, “that the Non-Co-operation Movement as represented by Mahatma Gandhi, blocks the way to co-operation between the East and West?”

“No, certainly not!” was the emphatic and decisive answer. “It rather opens the way towards true co-operation. The great obstacle to honourable friendship is insincerity. Subjection inevitably leads to insincerity. Mahatma Gandhi’s movement (as it appears to me) is

a religious one. It aims at perfect frankness of spirit and the purification of all insincerity from the heart of those who engage in it. I do not mean for a moment that my friends, who do not follow Mahatma Gandhi are insincere. Indeed I always go and stay with them and accept their hospitality as a protest against any idea of this kind. But it is true to-day that very many Indians indeed have been able for the first time to speak out truly their minds since they joined Mahatma Gandhi's movement. I have myself felt strengthened in sincerity and outspokenness, through my sympathy with it. "I feel," Mr. Andrews confessed gladly, "that this has made me a better interpreter between East and West, and not a worse one. In the same way, I am quite certain that Englishmen generally when by means of this movement utter frankness between the two races is established, will respect Indians and understand Indians far better than they do.

"Anything more?" asked Mr. Andrews, I asked: What is your message to Young India?

"My message? he said,—and then gave it.. "I have only one message to-day, which is in the form of a prayer. It comes from Gitanjali and runs as follows:—

124 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

“Strike my lord, strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor.

Or to bow my knee before insolent might.”

APPENDIX IV

MILK FOR THE POOR—THE PROBLEM OF COW PROTECTION

This paper will be brief, and I shall try to make it practical. I have been very deeply troubled in my own mind at the ill nurtured condition of the children of the poor in India. My object in writing is to help the poor people of India who are suffering from lack of milk, which is the most nourishing of all foods. Though I am not a Hindu, I believe I can understand the sentiment in every Hindu mind, which prevents the taking of the life of any animal without a pang of suffering, and which finds its fullest strength in the protection of milch kine.

I deeply respect that sentiment. It is easy to see what it has meant to India all through her past history. For we know, how this very reverence for the milch kine has preserved for Indian use the almost only food, rich in protein,

which the people of India, who are vegetarians, possess,—namely milk. Without such protein, the great intellectual development of India in the past would probably never have taken place; for the brain of man must have its nervous powers sustained by its own proper food. And we have recently been learning from science what a supremely health giving and sustaining food milk is, and how it helps to build up the wonderful structure of the human brain and to sustain the nervous system which the brain controls.

The problem of food to-day in India is this: During the past hundred years (as far as we are able to judge from the scanty data which exist) the population of India has increased from about 150,000,000 to 320,000,000 people. This means that the soil of India is obliged now to support more than double its previous population. The greater number of the people in India are vegetarians, either by choice, or from necessity. It follows that the grain supply for such a vast multitude has had to be more than doubled side by side with the increase of population, during the last hundred years.

Unfortunately, this has meant the continual decrease in grazing land of the country. More and more land has been used for grain, and

less and less land has been used for grass. This has been a terribly short-sighted policy. For it has meant that the people, out of dire necessity, have had less and less grass to give to their cattle. I am not blaming the people for what has happened. It has been a matter of overpopulation. But what I would point out is that such a policy as this, which impoverishes the cows, must be, in the long run, fatal in a country like India. For it has necessitated the withdrawal of milk from the diet of the people. In Bengal where I live, it is practically impossible now for the very poor to get milk at all. I believe that this absence of milk accounts for the increasing weakness of vitality, and also for the painfully early age at which people in India die. The infantile mortality in India today is greater than that of any other country in the world. Here then is our main problem.

We now come to remedies. There is no doubt, I am afraid, that the milk giving capacity of cows in India has become very inadequate. Some have proposed to remedy this by a destruction of inferior cattle and a concentration on those which give a large supply of milk. No doubt, the breeding of milch kine is a very important subject, and everything humane and reasonable should be done to

improve the breed. But the slaughter of cattle is against Indian sentiment, and such a short cut to success in cattle breeding is clearly inhumane, when the subject is regarded from the religious standpoint. I am certain myself that this humane sentiment in India, which has extended its protection to animals as well as men and women, is a true one. The higher humanity in every country of the world will have to accept this sentiment in some form or other, if the moral ideal of mankind is to reach its goal.

The slaughter of inferior cattle is no remedy. What then can be done? We have seen a wonderful change come over Hindu-Mussalman sentiment, for which every true lover of India must be devoutly thankful. The last festival of the Bakrid represents a turning point in Indian History. Muhammadans have shown their love for the motherland by respecting a sentiment, which, in no way conflicting with their own religion, is clearly a part as it were, of the very soil of India. By so respecting ancient Indian sentiment and by refusing to sacrifice cows, Muhammadans have shown themselves to be true sons of the soil of India. They have helped greatly to solve the problem of cow protection.

The time has now come for the Christian

community, to which I myself belong, to follow suit. It is the highest command of our Christian religion to respect the feelings of others, as we respect our own. This has been called the golden rule of life. It is as clear as possible, therefore, that we, who are Christians, ought not to outrage, if we can possibly help it, the religious sentiments of the vast majority of Indians, into whose country we have come as guests. The simplest remedy as far as the Christian community is concerned, would be, that a strict order should be given, with regard to British soldiers, that no slaughter of cows for the soldiers' food should be allowed. This slaughter of cows, on a large scale for the British soldiers has been a continual offence to the popular Indian mind. It has been no less offensive than the sacrifice of cows at the time of the Bakrid. It should be removed at once.

But these two questions of sentiment, though of very great importance for cow protection cannot solve the main issue. That main issue as I have shown, is a shortage of fodder, due to the rapid increase of population. How can this be remedied ?

We must first go to the encroachment made by the Government itself on the grazing lands

130 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

of the people. These are two in number, (i) the forests, (ii) the railways.

(i) There is no need to argue out the case that the forests of India in the past provided a supply of green fodder for the cattle. But the grazing rights of these forests (specially in the Hills) have been restricted more and more and the cattle have suffered. The process of forest reserves has gone too far.

A burning indignation exists among the poor people whose rights have been often ruthlessly taken away without any compensation. I have seen this indignation, when I have lived among the Hill people in the Simla Hills and I have sympathised with it.

(ii) Again, in laying out the railways of India, a very large amount of land has been usurped by the state. After coming from Europe, it is amazing to see what extensive areas are left on either side of the railway line, fenced in by the Railway Companies. This land might be given back to the people, to be used as grazing land by the people. Where the railway itself belongs to the state, this process of restoring these superfluous railway lands to the people would not be difficult. Therefore, a beginning of such recovery should be made along the State Railway lines. It may be that

other areas, also, which have passed away from the people, might be recovered at the same time.

This brings me to the question of the land, which is still Government land. If the Government were a popular Government, it would at once make a survey, and find out what could be done with waste lands all over India, wherever they are still unused, in spite of the pressure of cultivation. Such a survey is badly needed. It is quite possible that large grazing grounds even now exist, which are still neglected. In England and Scotland, during the war, very large areas were discovered, on which food crops could be grown. Now a crisis has come in India, and every vacant area should be used for feeding the cattle which give us milk. Again, India is, on the one hand, a country with very long months of dry weather, during which the cattle suffer terribly for want of green fodder. On the other hand (as we all know) during the monsoon months, green fodder is almost too plentiful. Much of it is wasted. We have to find out how this green fodder can be preserved. There is no doubt that here Science has a very great part to play in the solution of our Indian problem. It has been found quite feasible in America to store green fodder, and

to keep it from rotting, without too great expense. I believe one of the processes is called 'Ensilage.' The best minds of India that have made agricultural science their own subject, ought to be engaged on this question of the storage of green fodder for the cattle. If it can be solved, India can give her milch kine abundant fodder all the year round.

We come now to the problem, 'What can the people themselves accomplish, in order to increase the green fodder of India?' Lord Tenterden has suggested legislation, by which five acres, in every hundred, should be preserved by law for grazing. I doubt, myself, whether this law could be universally applied. But very much indeed could be done by placing back into the hands of the village community their ancient powers of reserving land for grazing (at the discretion of the village panchayat) in order to give fodder to all the cattle of the village farmers. Furthermore, instruction might be given with regard to the short-sightedness of the policy of continually taking grain crops from the soil, without allowing any fallow seasons during which grass might be grown—But all these are strictly scientific subjects, which are beyond my own province to discuss.

May I make one suggestion? It is this that

we do not go on begging and petitioning for a Government Commission. Much rather let us have a commission of our own. Let us invite, if necessary, two or three friends to come over from England or America, as an act of love and service, not for a mere money payment. We need to gather experience from all sides. At the same time we must not rely on others, but on ourselves. Let the very best of our own Indian agricultural experts offer their services to the nation. Let them concentrate on this one problem of fodder,—how to increase the grass supply which is the very life of the cattle of India.

Thus regarded, the whole question becomes very simple. If the fodder given to the cows is increased then the milk supply will be increased. Then, also, the cows themselves will not remain in their present half-starved condition. And if the milk supply of India is abundant, then the people will themselves receive their own proper, life-giving, nourishment. The higher intellectual life of the Indian people, on which so much depends, will not be starved. The death-rate among little children will not be so excessive. An intolerable burden of mental and physical poverty will be removed.

I wish to make a confession. For many years

past I have taken a deep interest in the question of cow protection, but I have shrunk from coming forward publicly. The reason for this was that I had previously looked upon cow protection as a purely Hindu problem, with which Hindus ought themselves to deal. But I have become convinced that I was wrong. I am convinced, now, that this whole problem in India is a directly humanitarian issue. Furthermore, I am convinced that there is no solution of this question until Muhammadans and Christians and Parsis join with their brothers, the Hindus, in the work of cow protection. It ought not to be undertaken any longer by one community alone but by all communities. As soon as I understood this clearly, it was my duty to act upon it. It is for this reason that I have come to Brindaban, all the way from Calcutta, in order to fulfil this obligation and take up actively the cause of cow protection.

One last word. I have had for many years past a very deep affection for Brindaban itself. The beauty of the place, together with the quiet, peaceful, religious lives of those that live in its forests, very powerfully moved me, whenever I visited the spot. My sole purpose, on my first visit, was to get the killing, for what is called 'sport,' of timid animals, in the forests

surrounding Brindaban, altogether stopped. I am sorry to say that this purpose has not yet been accomplished. But I am not going to give way to despair on that account. I still firmly believe that, now, when the whole country is awake, such a humane proposal as the prohibition of killing animals for sport in Brindaban will not be disregarded. The will of the people in this matter,—the peace-loving, devout, religious people,—cannot be lightly despised, or arrogantly set at naught. It is in their name that I am going forward.

During this present visit, while I have been visiting this most beautiful spot once more, not only on behalf of the Cow Protection Society of Calcutta but also on behalf of all the animal life at Brindaban to prevent their slaughter, the thought has struck me forcibly, —‘ What ideal grazing ground these banks of the Jumna, with their shady groves, would make for the cattle ! ’

Cannot the sacred area of Brindaban, therefore, be not only preserved against animal slaughter, but also saved as far as possible for cattle pasturage? In this way, if those who dearly love Brindaban would take action, the ancient ideal of Brindaban would itself be kept fresh in the minds and hearts of the countless

136 THE OPPRESSION OF THE POOR

devoted and religious people of India, and the poetry and the beauty of Brindaban would not be lost to mankind.

